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THE NEW YORKER

MAR. 6, 2000

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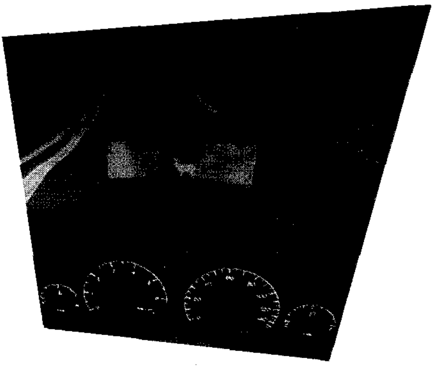

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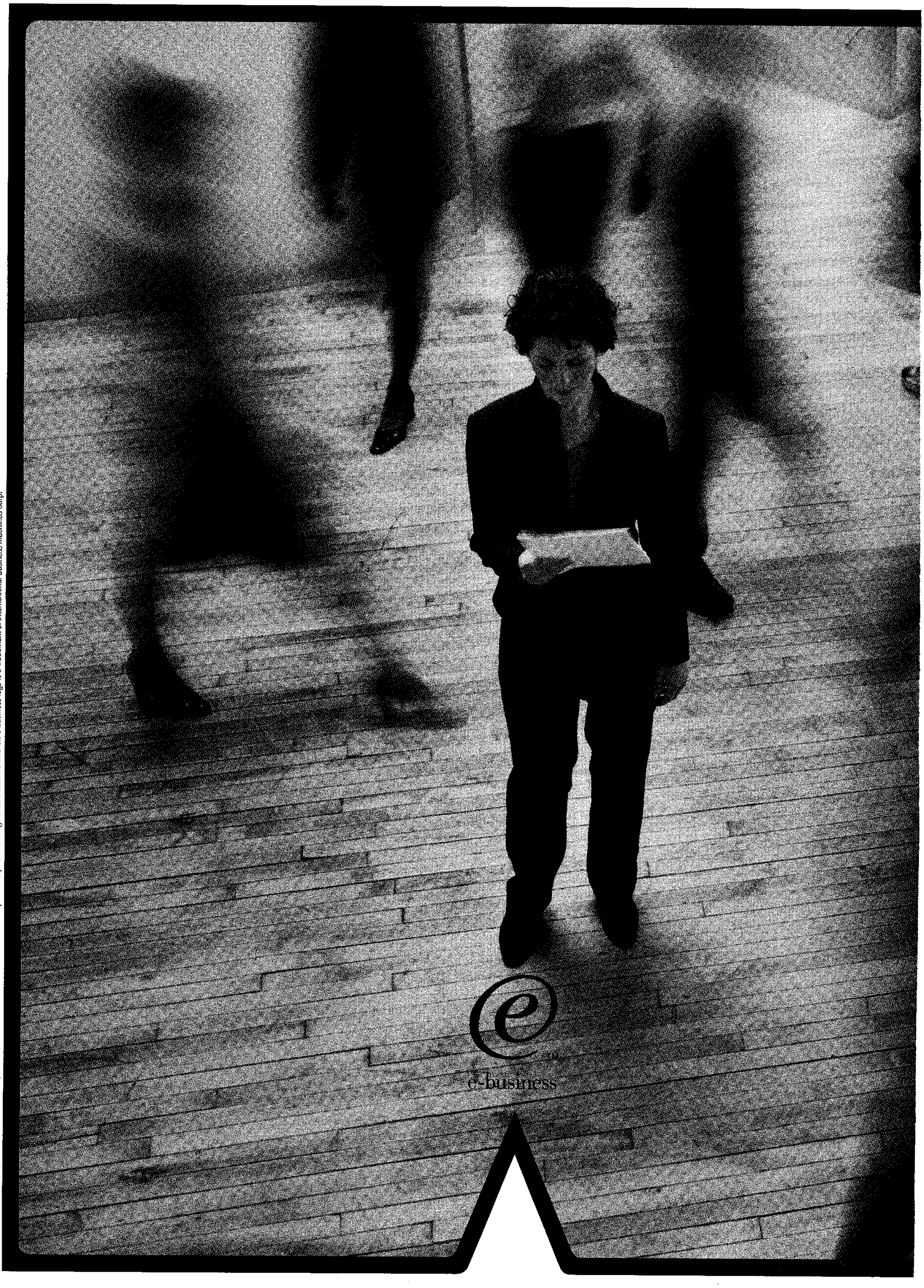

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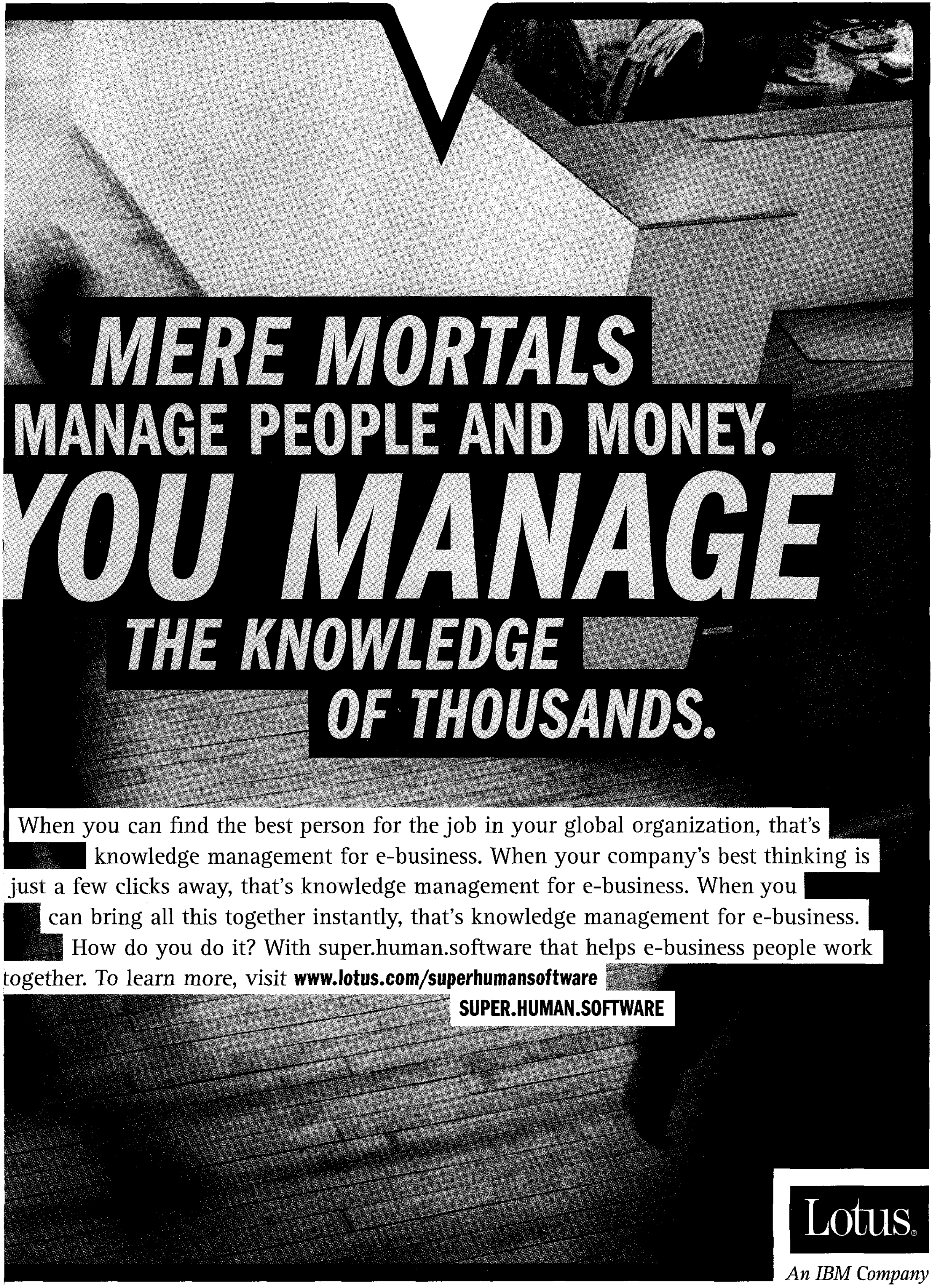

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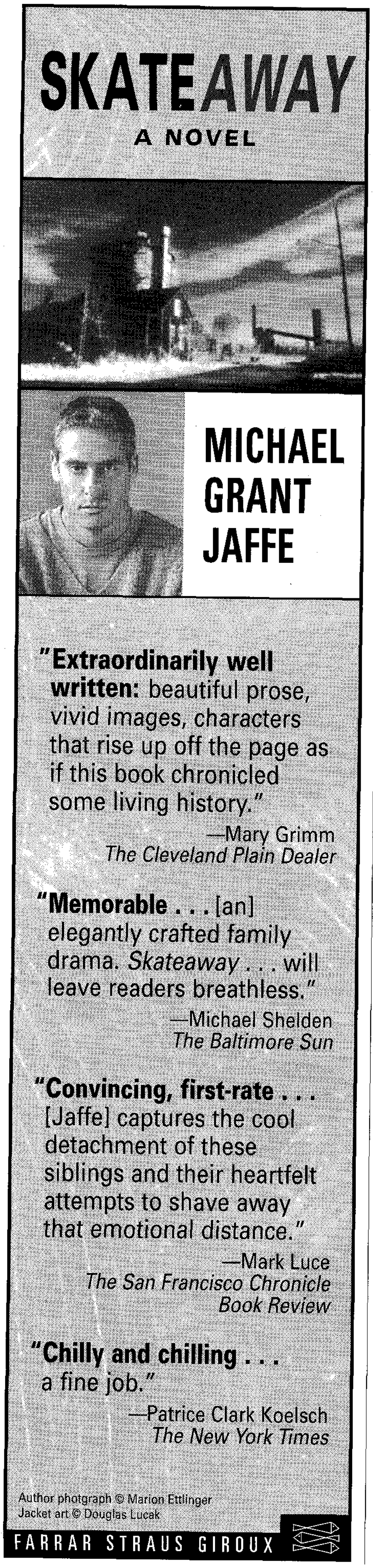
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A NOVEL

MICHAEL GRANT JAFFE

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The New York Times

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FARRAR STRAUS GIROUX

THE NEW YORKER

MARCH 6, 2000

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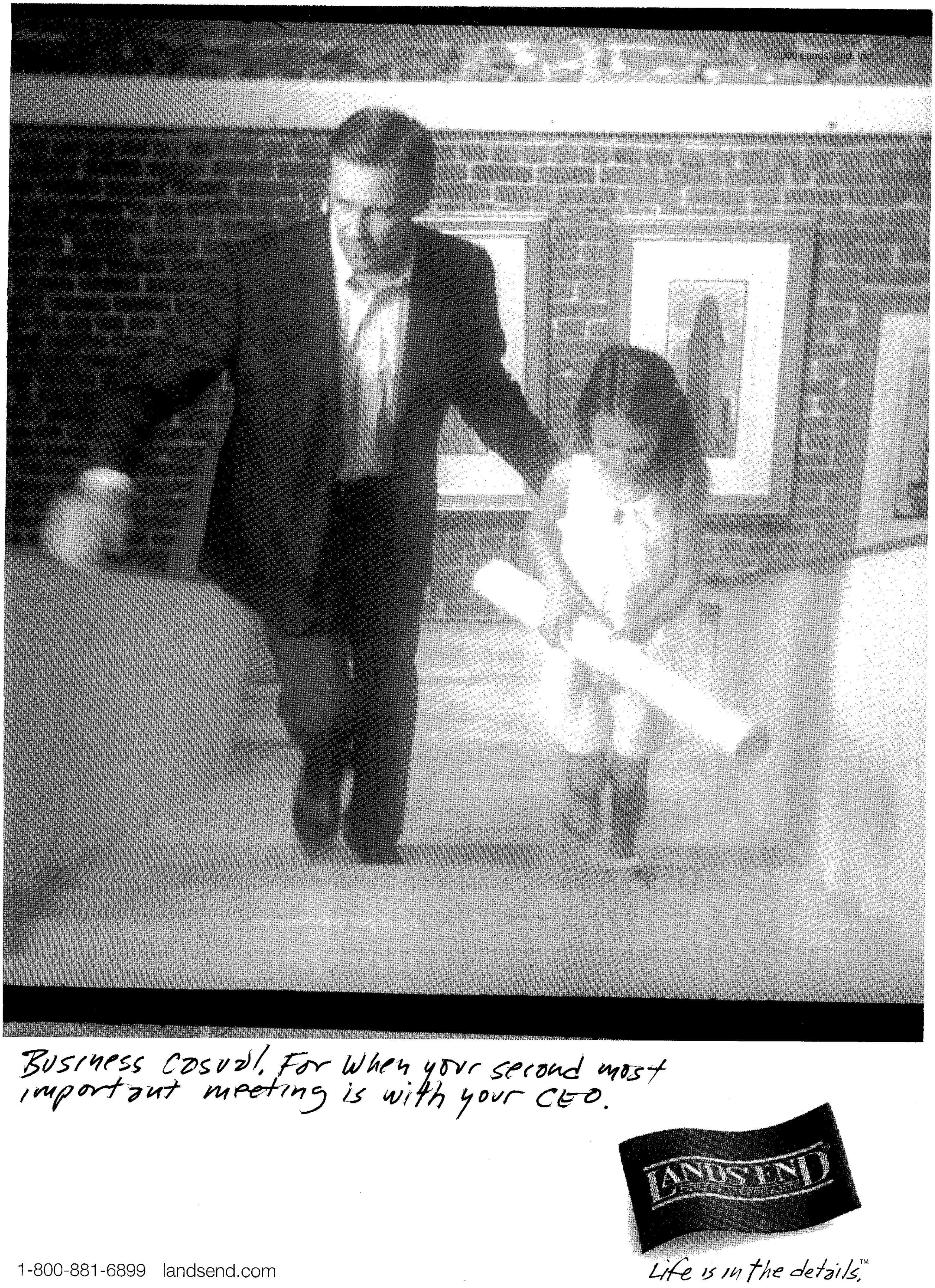
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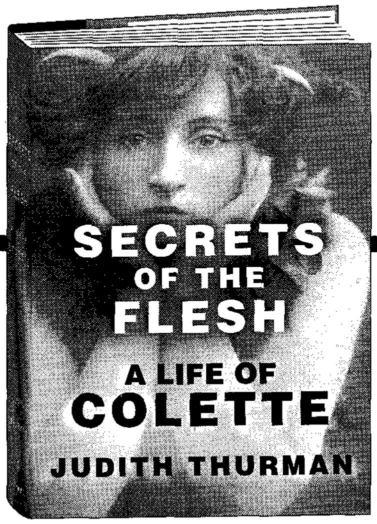

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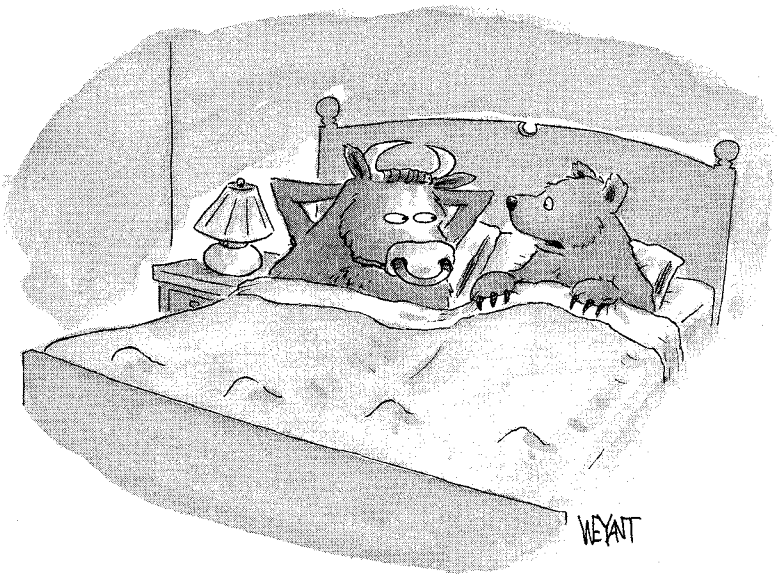

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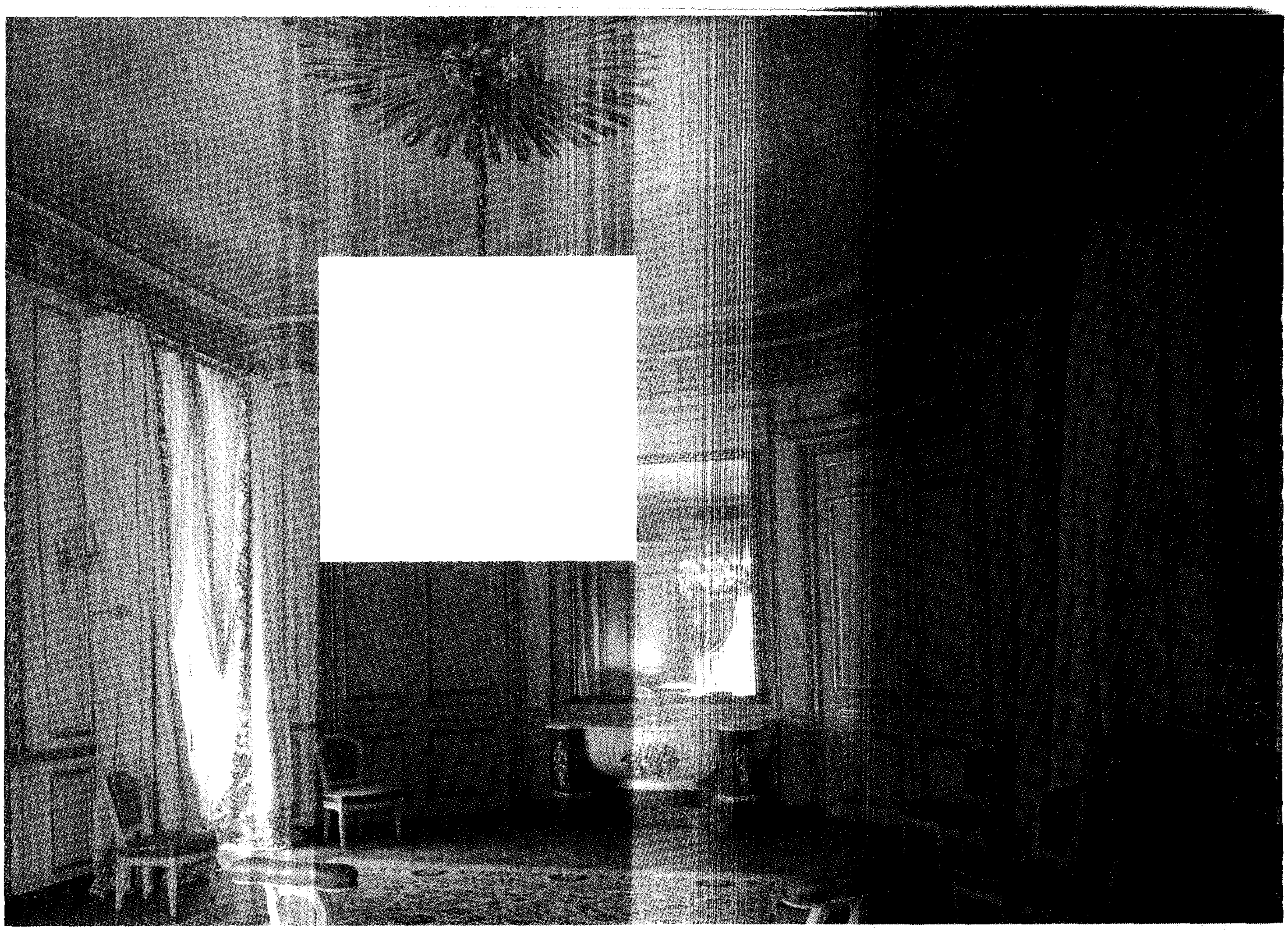

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OUR OSAMA ODIUM

Mary Anne Weaver's article "The Real bin Laden" (January 24th) provided a good look at how the United States government has successfully mythologized a global menace. But more than that, the government has packaged and marketed the threat of terrorism by using the adman's oldest tool, brand recognition. By attaching a human face to the amorphous notion of terrorism, the U.S. has been able to mobilize domestic and international support for its tail-chasing exercise of trying to eliminate terrorism's threat. But should bin Laden, now the epitome of unadulterated evil, ever be eliminated, American officials will assuredly have a difficult time explaining why this threat still exists.

Cameron Hudson
Washington, D.C.

UNCONSTITUTIONAL STATES?

Taylor Branch, in his review of Garry Wills's "A Necessary Evil" (January 24th), endorses Abraham Lincoln's argument that "no political body had ever been 'a state out of the Union.' " But that position is called into question by the fact that there were only eleven states in the Union at the time of George Washington's inauguration—neither North Carolina nor Rhode Island had ratified the Constitution. Whether that justifies later secession is, of course, debatable, but that is the point: issues like union, secession, and even the status of guns *are* open to debate—they are not subject to the dismissive fiats of Wills or Branch.

Sanford Levinson
Professor, University of Texas Law School
Austin, Tex.

NATALIE LEARNS TO DRIVE

J. Mays, the Ford Motor Company designer who conceived the new 24•7 for "the generation of drivers who grew up with computers" (Talk of the Town, January 24th), must have been born in the era of Charles Babbage's difference engine. Though the car is voice-activated and highly connected, Mays illustrates the car's abilities with the experience of driver Natalie. Natalie, he says, "is the wife in our imaginary family, and she doesn't like a lot of complicated gauges." Does Ford think female Information Agers are afraid of buttons and dials? I laughed so hard at this I almost drooled all over my Palm Pilot. I won't ask if this silly car comes with a stick shift, but I can certainly tell Mays what to do with one.

Beth Fabinsky
Pasadena, Calif.

WRITING WRONGS

Every article on screenwriting, including Tad Friend's piece about Ron Bass ("The Two-Billion-Dollar Man," January 24th), recycles the same clichés. Yes, writers may be low on the totem pole, but only in relation to the other above-the-line players who create the film: the director, the star, and, sometimes, the producer and the studio boss. Is that hierarchy unjust, relative to creative importance? Of course. Yet writers still belong to an élite, powerful group and are hardly "hapless serfs of Hollywood." A successful screenwriter gets to see his imagined story unfold on film. How many people in the filmmaking process make that kind of creative, authorial contribution? Friend notes that many years ago, Jack Warner called screenwriters "schmucks with Underwoods." But legend has it that one of Warner's contemporaries, Irving Thalberg, said something more truthful and revealing: "Writers are the most important people in film, and we must do everything to keep them from finding out." Some of us have figured it out on our own.

Paul Harris Boardman
Los Angeles, Calif.

•

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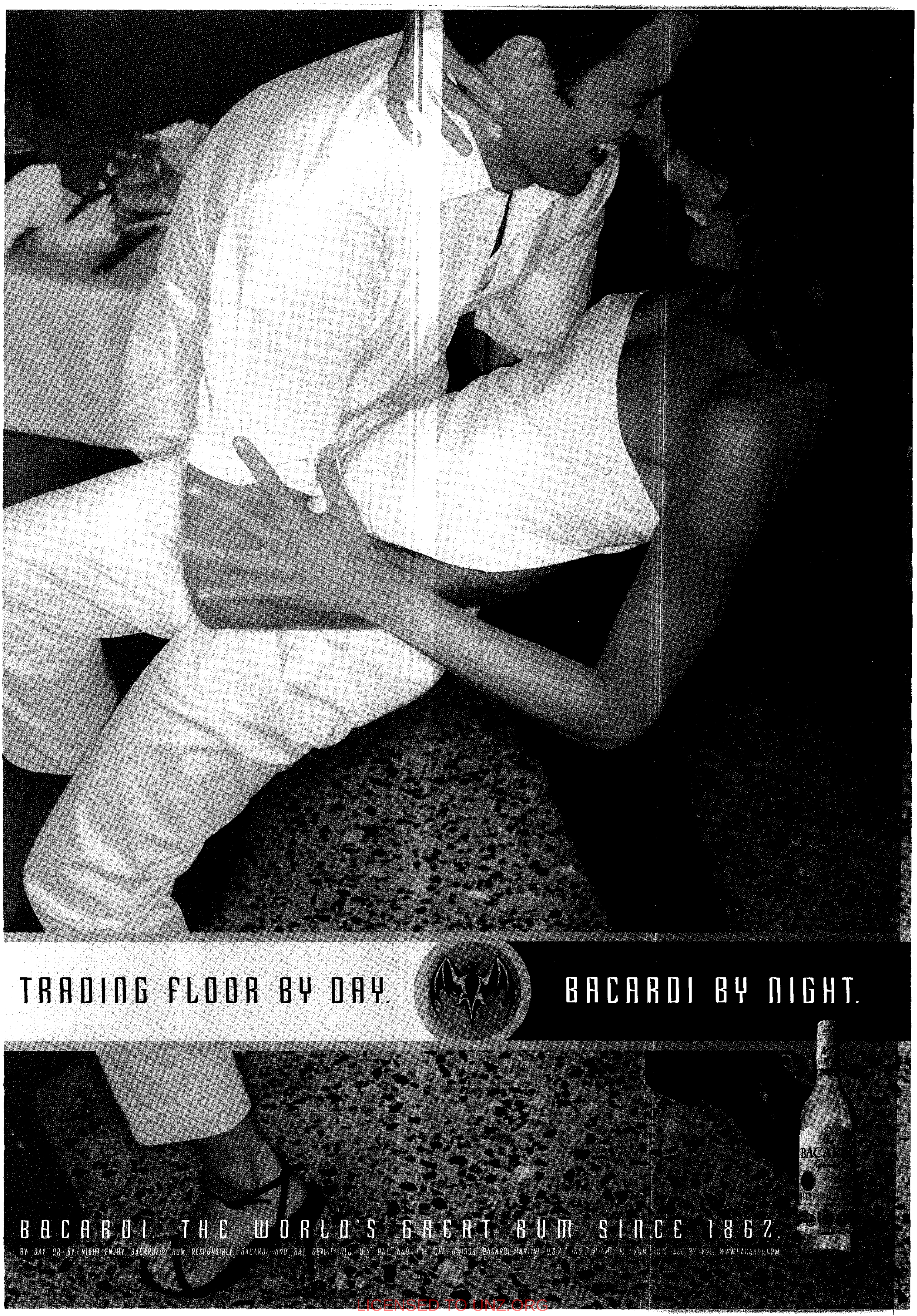
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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS & PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

AIDA
A musical based on the Verdi opera. With music by Elton John, lyrics by Tim Rice, and a book by Linda Woolverton and David Henry Hwang. Heather Headley, Adam Pascal, and Sherie René Scott lead the cast. Robert Falls is the director. In previews. (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4747.)

THE ALTRUISTS
A new comedy from Nicky Silver, starring Veanne Cox and Sam Robards. In previews through March 5. Opens March 6 at 8. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 353-0303.)

AN EMPTY PLATE AT THE CAFÉ DU GRAND BOEUF
John Rando is the director of this comedy by Michael Hollinger, in which a restaurateur goes on a hunger strike. In previews. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-4052.)

THE MOMENT WHEN
A new play by James Lapine, starring Illeana Douglas, Phyllis Newman, and Mark Ruffalo. In previews. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

RIVERDANCE
The Irish troupe of dancers, singers, and musicians comes to Broadway. Previews begin March 3. (Gershwin, 51st St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

SUEÑO
MCC Theatre presents a new translation, by José Rivera, of the Calderón de la Barca drama "Life Is a Dream." Opens March 1 at 7. (120 W. 28th St. 727-7765.)

TAKING A CHANCE ON LOVE
A musical revue about the life and work of the late, overlooked lyricist John Latouche, staged by the York Theatre Company. Two previews on March 1. Opens March 2 at 8. (Theatre at St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 239-6200.)

TRUE WEST
Philip Seymour Hoffman and John C. Reilly star in Sam Shepard's 1980 play, under the direction of Matthew Warchus. In previews. (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200.)

THE WAVERLY GALLERY
Eileen Heckart portrays an aging Greenwich Village art dealer who must give up her gallery, in a new play by Kenneth Lonergan ("This Is Our Youth"). Previews begin March 3. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 239-6200.)

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OPENED RECENTLY

THE ALCHEMIST
Dan Castellaneta (the voice of Homer Simpson) leads the cast in the Classic Stage Company's staging of Ben Jonson's 1610 comedy. (136 E. 13th St. 677-4210, ext. 2. Closes March 12.)

AMADEUS
From London, a revival of Peter Shaffer's drama, starring Michael Sheen as Mozart and David Suchet as Salieri. Sir Peter Hall is the director. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

ARMS AND THE MAN
A Roundabout Theatre production of Shaw's 1894 play, under the direction of Roger Rees. (Gramercy, 127 E. 23rd St. 777-4900.)

BAD BOY NIETZSCHE
Richard Foreman's forty-seventh play. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 533-4650.)

THE BOMB-ITTY OF ERRORS
In this exuberant take on "The Comedy of Errors," the action has been shifted to a hip-hop realm, but the basic ideas remain the same. Like the Shakespeare original, "Bomb-Itty" is witty, lewd, allusive, and chaotic, and it plays fast and loose with stereotypes, but the four extravagantly talented writer-actors (who play all of the parts) make it seem altogether new. Their enthusiasm for the material is infectious. (45 Bleecker, 45 Bleecker St., at Lafayette St. 307-4100.)

DAME EDNA: THE ROYAL TOUR
Former housewife turned international entertainer Dame Edna Everage (the sublime comic creation of the Australian Dadaist and dandy Barry Humphries) is, to adopt her penchant for alliteration, a virago of vitriol, a harpy of happiness, a megastar of maliciousness. (Reviewed in our issue of 11/1/99.) (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

DINNER WITH FRIENDS
Donald Margulies's new play is a perceptive depiction of the mystery and the mundanity of marriage, and the cast give well-rounded performances. (Variety Arts, 110 Third Ave., at 14th St. 239-6200.)

THE DIRECTOR
Through the character of a theatre director who tries to find truth by playing abusive mind games with everyone he knows, the playwright Nancy Hasty asks whether acting (which is essentially lying) can reveal deeper truth. It's a smart play, more grounded than it might sound, and, though it's not entirely satisfying intellectually, John Shea's brilliant performance as the director almost makes it seem so. Tasha Lawrence, as an aspiring playwright, is equally good. (Arclight, 152 W. 71st St. 279-4200.)

ENOUGH ABOUT ME: AN UNAUTHORIZED BIOGRAPHY OF VARLA JEAN MERMAN
The alleged love child of Ernest Borgnine and Ethel Merman shares songs and stories from her painful life. (Chelsea Playhouse, 125 W. 22nd St. 307-4100.)

FUDDY MEERS
David Lindsay-Abaire's kitchen-sink comedy, starring J. Smith-Cameron. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 307-4100.)

FULLY COMMITTED
In this hilarious one-man comedy, Mark Setlock plays a lovable reservations clerk at an unnamed tony Manhattan restaurant, who deals with the daily deluge of calls from dying-to-be-guests. (Cherry Lane Theatre, 38 Commerce St. 239-6200.)

JACKIE MASON: MUCH ADO ABOUT EVERYTHING
The comic is back on Broadway with a new show. (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

JAMES JOYCE'S THE DEAD
Playwrights Horizons' musical version of the short story. (11/8/99) (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

KISS ME, KATE
This revival of the Cole Porter musical represents the highest level of theatrical collaboration currently on Broadway. With all its admirable expertise and its various delights, though, the production is oddly earthbound: it comes down to the vexing issue of chemistry. The leads, Marin Mazzie and Brian Stokes Mitchell, are expert players, but they are not—in the true meaning of the words—star performers, the kind who bring something larger than life to musical stories. (11/29/99) (Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

LETTERS FROM CUBA
The Signature Theatre Company's final production in its Maria Irene Fornes season. (555 W. 42nd St. 244-7529. Closes March 12.)

LOVE IN A THIRSTY LAND
A Polish Jewish immigrant is accused of murder in 1875, in a drama by Alan Glass. Staged by the Jewish Repertory Theatre. (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 831-2000.)

NIGHTHAWKS
From the Willow Cabin Theatre Company, a drama about urban isolation by Lynn Rosen. (Blue Heron, 123 E. 24th St. 886-1889. Closes March 5.)

women.

love.

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if these walls could talk 2

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NORTH ATLANTIC
The Wooster Group's multimedia play, set aboard an aircraft carrier during the Cold War. (Performing Garage, 33 Wooster St. 966-3651.)

OTHELLO
Evil is rearing a charming head on East Fourth Street, in the National Asian American Theatre Company's latest take on Shakespeare. Joel de la Fuente's Iago has his way with the audience, and Othello himself, from beginning to end; even at the moment of his greatest defeat, he looks as if he's hatching another scheme. Tess Lina, as his wife, is equally strong; in the background of the play's stark tales of betrayal, these two performances are a subtle study of our modern fascination with evil's ambiguous appeal. Directed with insight and verve by Jonathan Bank. Michael G. Chin's fight choreography is splendid. (Connelly Theatre, 220 E. 4th St. For information and tickets, call 718-623-1672. Closes March 4.)

OUR PLACE IN TIME
Six actors portray more than thirty New York characters, in a collection of interwoven scenes by Clare Coss. (Women's Project and Productions Theatre, 424 W. 55th St. 239-6200.)

POJAGI
Part Four of the director Ping Chong's East-West series explores Korean history from the sixteenth through twentieth centuries. March 1-4 at 8 and March 5 at 3:30 and 8. (LaMama, 74A E. 4th St. 475-7710.)

SATURDAY NIGHT
Stephen Sondheim's first musical, about a Flatbush man (David Campbell) who leaves Brooklyn in 1929 to seek his fortune on Wall Street and win a débutante's heart. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 246-4422.)

SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER
The musical, based on the 1977 film. (Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

SPLENDORA
A man returns to his Texas hometown disguised as a woman, in a musical by Peter Webb, Stephen Hoffman, and Mark Campbell. (Chelsea Playhouse, 125 W. 22nd St. 307-4100.)

SQUONK
The multimedia performance piece has moved to Broadway. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

SWING!
A musical salute to the genre, directed and choreographed by Lynne Taylor-Corbett. (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

THE TALE OF THE ALLERGIST'S WIFE
Charles Busch's new comedy, about an antidote to midlife malaise, stars Linda Lavin, Michele Lee, and Tony Roberts. (Manhattan Theatre Club, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

THE TORCH-BEARERS
The Drama Dept. presents George Kelly's 1922 satire of community theatre. (Greenwich House, 27 Barrow St. 541-8441. Closes March 4.)

TWO SISTERS AND A PIANO
The sisters are Cuban dissidents in 1991; the piano is a symbol of the intellectual freedom they're trying to defend. But the playwright Nilo Cruz's real subject ends up being the tensions between various forces in Communist Cuba as the Soviet Union collapses—official, intellectual, sexual. Adriana Sevan and Daphne Rubin-Vega are terrific as the sisters, but it is Paul Calderon's performance that stands out. As a poor boy given opportunities by the revolution, he ends up bewildered by its failures and by his love for one of the sisters; ultimately his story wrenchingly reveals the heart of Cuba's dilemma. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200. Closes March 5.)

THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES
Eve Ensler's one-woman show, based on interviews she conducted with two hundred women about their vaginas, is now being performed by a rotating three-woman cast. There's a certain amount of shtick involved, but most of the stories are touching and memorable. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

THE VOYSEY INHERITANCE
Harley Granville-Barker's 1905 play might have been the "Wall Street" of its day. As patriarch of the family and head of the respected London firm of Voysey and Son, the cunningly magisterial actor George Morfogen never comes right out and announces that greed is good, but he does make a compelling case for financial amorality, much to the shock of his innocent son (Kraig Swartz). Granville-Barker appeared in a number of Shaw's plays, and the Shavian influence is apparent in this fine production: there are laughs, a little romance, and philosophical and social debate amid the intrigue. (Mint, 311 W. 43rd St. 315-0231.)

WAITING IN THE WINGS
In the best of Noël Coward's postwar plays, old gallant theatricals duke it out in a retirement home, where they fire off some terrific one-liners. Although the play itself is somewhat creaky, the pros who bring it to life here aren't: Bette Henritze, Elizabeth Wilson, Rosemary Harris, Dana Ivey, and the evergreen Lauren Bacall. (Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

THE WILD PARTY
A musical by Andrew Lippa, based on the 1928 poem by Joseph Moncure March. Gabriel Barre is the director. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

WOYZECK
In the Axis Theatre Company's version of Büchner's unfinished play, the author's life becomes intertwined with the lives of his characters. (One Sheridan Sq., near Seventh Ave. 807-9300.)

LONG RUNS

ANNIE GET YOUR GUN
Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST
Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 307-4747.

BLUE MAN GROUP / TUBES
Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370.

CABARET
Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200.

CATS
Winter Garden, Broadway at
50th St. 239-6200.

CHICAGO
Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

DE LA GUARDA
Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E.,
at 15th St. 239-6200.

THE FANTASTICKS
Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St.,
at Bleecker St. 674-3838.

FOOTLOOSE
Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.

FORBIDDEN BROADWAY
Stardust, Broadway at 51st St. 239-6200.

FOSSE
Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH
Jane Street Theatre, Hotel Riverview
Ballroom, 113 Jane St. 239-6200.

I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT, NOW CHANGE
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.

JEKYLL & HYDE
Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

LATE-NITE CATECHISM
St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200.

THE LION KING
New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.

LES MISÉRABLES
Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

MISS SAIGON
Broadway Theatre, Broadway
at 53rd St. 239-6200.

OVER THE RIVER AND THROUGH THE WOODS
John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.

PERFECT CRIME
Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401.

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA
Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

RENT
Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000.

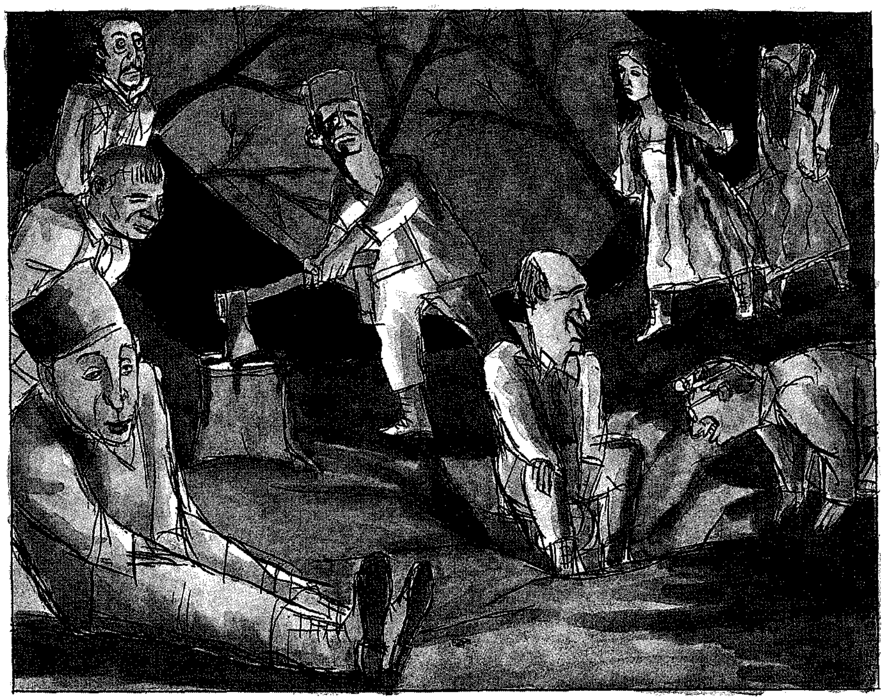
STOMP
Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at
St. Marks Pl. 477-2477.

TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING
St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200.

WIT
Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.

DANCE

PAUL TAYLOR DANCE COMPANY
Feb. 29 at 7:30: "Company B," "Arabesque," and "Piazzolla Caldera." ♦ March 1 at 8, March 4 at 2, and March 5 at 7:30: "Cascade," "Lost, Found, and Lost," and "Le Sacre du Printemps (The Rehearsal)." ♦ March 2 and March 4 at 8: "Sunset," "Arabesque," and "Esplanade." ♦ March 3



Axis Theatre's adaptation of Büchner's "Woyzeck."

BEN KATCHOR

and March 7 at 8 and March 5 at 3: "Aureole," "Big Bertha," "Syzygy," and "Company B." (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Through March 12.)

MARTHA@MOTHER

Richard Move, in his tall, glam, and uncanny evocation of the choreographer Martha Graham, opens a new season of monthly dance showcases, with performances from Merce Cunningham (March 1) and such other dance luminaries as Rob Besserer (as Erick Hawkins), Julie Atlas Muz, and Doug Varone and Gwen Welliver. The evenings include the première of a new Charles Atlas video collaboration with Cunningham. (875 Washington St. 924-0077. March 1 at 8 and 10 and March 2-3 at 8.)

DONALD BYRD/THE GROUP

The troupe presents an evening-length work, "In a Different Light: Duke Ellington." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Feb. 29 at 7:30, March 1-3 at 8, March 4 at 2 and 8, and March 5 at 2 and 7:30.)

LIMÓN DANCE COMPANY

The fourteen-member company performs "Evening Songs" (1987), "Missa Brevis" (1958), and "The Moor's Pavane" (1949). (Riverside Church, Riverside Dr. at 120th St. 307-4100. March 2-3 at 8, March 4 at 2 and 8, and March 5 at 2.)

"THE LIFE AND MORALS OF A NIGHT CHAMELEON"

The Cie Phillipe Saire, from Lausanne, Switzerland, uses the liaisons and cases of mistaken identity in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" as the inspiration for a moody and impulsive quintet about desire. (Danspace Project, St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. March 2-5 at 8:30.)

RAMOS DANCE

The Bronx-based troupe performs five works by the choreographer Chris DC Ramos, including "Incierto Conexion," set to the music of Astor Piazzolla. (Merce Cunningham Studios, 55 Bethune St. 924-0077. March 3 at 9 and March 4-5 at 8.)

"THE SUBJECT TONIGHT IS LOVE"

Five works choreographed by Robin Becker, inspired by the poems of Jalal ad-Din ar-Rumi, and two improvisations based on the ecstatic trance dancing of whirling dervishes. (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St. 334-7479. March 3-5 at 8.)

"ANOTHER TELEPATHIC THING"

Annie-B Parson and Paul Lazar's Big Dance Theatre blends elements of Mark Twain's "The Mysterious Stranger" with segments of stolen Hollywood audition tapes in a tale about the angel Satan in L.A. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. March 2-4 at 8 and March 5 at 3.)

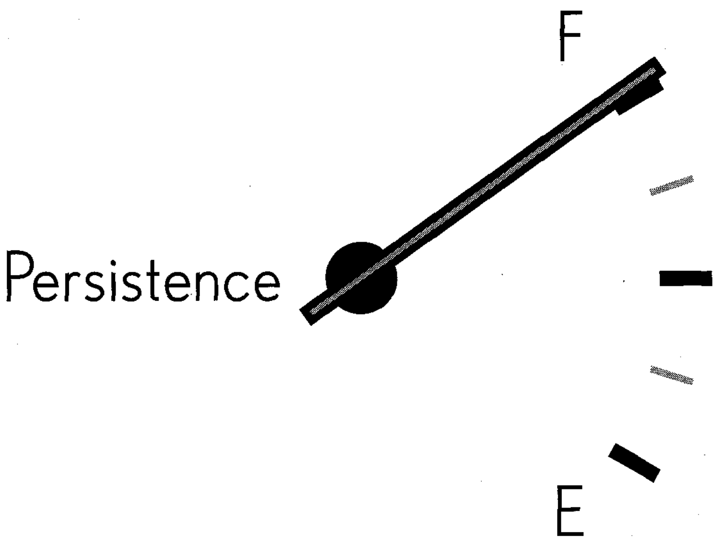
BARNARD DANCES AT MILLER

Four works performed by Barnard dancers: "Liquid Steel," by Francesca Harper; "Goodbye and Good Luck," by Neta Pulvermacher; "Dark Star," by Janet Soares; and "Ride the Culture Loop," by Anna Sokolow. (Miller Theatre, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. March 2-4 at 8.)

NIGHT LIFE
CONCERTS

SMASH MOUTH / LUSCIOUS JACKSON

Fronted by heavyset vocalist Steve Harwell, whose Teamster image is a refreshing antidote to the current glut of boy-band peach fuzz, this baggy-pants-wearing, post-punk four-piece from Southern California hit the jackpot last summer with "All-Star," a sugary, AM-radio-friendly anthem to individuality. / After its 1996 CD, "Fever In Fever Out," spawned the hit single "Naked Eye" (with a little sonic gilding by producer Daniel Lanois), Luscious Jackson appeared ready for a fame beyond the Lilith Fair. The female trio (which is named after an obscure Philadelphia 76ers basketball player) has a new record called "Electric Honey." Though there's no tune as memorable as "Naked Eye," "Honey" has a charged sweetness that does justice to its title. (Roseland, 239 W. 52nd St. 307-7171. March 1 at 7:30.)



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CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

ARLENE GROCERY
95 Stanton St., between Ludlow and Orchard Sts. (358-1633)—March 2: **Superlux,** a half-British, half-Israeli outfit, stops by on Thursdays in March. The band's lead singer, Trisha Mulcahy, has an ethereal English-accented voice that travels gracefully over keyboardist Dan Yashiv's clever pop arrangements.

BABY JUPITER
170 Orchard St. (982-2229)—The Washington, D.C.-based nine-piece band **Congregation** has opened for the likes of Jamiroquai, Kool and the Gang, and the Isley Brothers, and on March 3 they bring their high-test funk and soul to town.

BOTTOM LINE
15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—March 4: The jazz and folk veteran **Terry Callier,** whose thickly layered voice is the perfect match for his accomplished guitar playing, and **Rebecca Martin,** a local singer who has spent less time with a fret board than Callier, but whose talented songwriting and powerful vocal styling are already leading to a rewarding career.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—The three-woman operation called **Betty** arrives on March 1. Betty's act, a sort of cabaret gone haywire, contains elements of funk and rock music, performance art, satire, and standup comedy. Its latest release is the conceptual EP "Carnival," and this show promises to be a wild trip down the midway of the band's imagination. With the fierce and uncompromising singer **Toshi Reagon.** March 3-4: **Jonathan Richman,** the super-sensitive proto-punk icon with the adenoidal voice. With the riveting, unclassifiable singer-songwriter **Vic Chesnutt.** March 7: Mark Sandman, the lead singer of the haunting guitarless trio Morphine, suffered a fatal heart attack while onstage in Rome last July, less than a month after finishing the band's latest release, "The Night." The album, which was three years in the making, expands the group's sound by adding an organ and more strings. The two remaining members of the band, drummer Billy Conway and saxophonist Dana Colley (who'll take over as lead vocalist), along with seven other musicians, have put together **Orchestra Morphine** to bring Sandman's last effort to the public.

BROWNIES
169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (420-8392)—March 2: **The Up On In,** former Jawbox drummer Zach Barocas's new band, turns out brief but complex instrumental songs built around Barocas's shifting beats, the tight bass work of Charlie Bennett, and the sharp-edged guitar playing of Ryan Grayson.

GALAPAGOS
70 North 6th St., Williamsburg (718-782-5188)—March 2: **Carol Lipnik and Spookarama.** Lipnik, a singer with a five-octave range, and her band perform original music rooted in the carny atmosphere of Lipnik's home, Coney Island. With **Bradford Reed and His Amazing Pencilina.** Fifteen years ago, Reed built a peculiar, double-necked string instrument fitted with four bells and six pickups and called it a pencilina, because he first played it with a pencil. He can often be found performing before bewildered crowds on downtown sidewalks, but this is a prime chance to sit back and properly experience his signature sound—something like an ethereal slide guitar—as he plucks, strikes, and strokes away at his creation.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—March 1: Psychobilly drill sergeant **Reverend Horton Heat,** whose latest foot-stomping release, "Spend a Night in the Box," is due out at the end of the month, makes the crowd do musical pushups. With the ska punk of the **Dance Hall Crashers.** March 2: The mellow high-plains sounds of Canada's **Cowboy Junkies.** March 3: **LFO,** which stands for Lyte Funky Ones. This latest laboratory-engineered boy band from Orlando makes the Backstreet Boys look like Crosby, Stills, and Nash. They're hardly funky, but they're certainly lite. ♦ The Swing Dance Society gathers here every Sunday, with sets from eight until midnight. For information on the society, call 696-9737.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (539-8777)—The young lead singer of **Antony and the Johnsons Orchestra** possesses a sweet and haunting voice reminiscent of Brian Ferry and a theatrical, pansexual stage presence that recalls early Marc Bolan. On March 2 Antony starts a three-month biweekly residency here. March 3: **The Black Rock Coalition Orchestra** pays tribute to Curtis Mayfield.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—March 2: The **Folk Implosion,** Sebadoh frontman Lou Barlow's surprisingly successful side project. March 6: The neo-psychedelic tendencies of the Athens, Georgia, quartet **Elf Power.**

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—March 1: **Danú** hails from Waterford, Ireland, and the twenty-something-year-old members of this energetic septet have had dancers kicking up their heels at home for the past three years. Its critically acclaimed renditions of traditional Irish music can also be found on "Think Before You Think," its recently released U.S. début recording.

KEEP ON PUSHING *As the leader of the Impressions and as a solo soul artist, the late Curtis Mayfield wrote anthems of affirmation and empowerment such as "It's All Right," "I've Been Trying," and especially "People Get Ready." While other soul men begged, screamed, and shouted, the diminutive Mayfield sang in a sweet whisper that mixed sangfroid and sanctification. Best remembered for his soundtrack to the 1972 film "Superfly," Mayfield was paralyzed in a freak 1990 accident onstage in Brooklyn, and his health deteriorated until his death last December. Mayfield may be gone, but his music lives on, and the Black Rock Coalition Orchestra, featuring guitarist Vernon Reid, vocalist Sandra St. Victor, and others, will prove it at Joe's Pub (see Clubs).*

EDEL RODRIGUEZ

TONIC
107 Norfolk St. (358-7503)—March 4: The Brazilian guitarist **Vinicius Cantuária** has lived in New York City for the past six years, and rubbing elbows with such local musicians as Bill Frisell, Arto Lindsay, and Laurie Anderson (all of whom contribute to his latest album, "Tucumã") has helped him stretch the definition of bossa nova. Not that Cantuária needs much creative help; he's written hit songs for Caetano Veloso, Gal Costa, and other Brazilian superstars. The result, though, is a sophisticated and poignant sound, full of both the excitement of being an expatriate and the longing for a homeland.

VOID
16 Mercer St. (941-6492)—March 2: **Lakuna** is the creation of ex-Throwing Muses drummer David Narcizo and bassist Frank Gardner. Its début release, "Castle of Crime," is heavily produced and relies on reverb, echo, and other electronic tricks (Kristin Hersh contributes a guitar loop) to achieve its atmospheric feel. To help create the same effect live, this show features video projections by independent filmmaker Kraig Jordan.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—Through March 4: **Julie Wilson,** the doyenne of New York's chanteuses, is currently at work in the woody nook known as the Oak Room, with a program dedicated to the songs of Dixieland, backed by the banjo, tuba, trombone, and reed section of the Smith Street Society Jazz Band. Dining.

IRIDIUM
48 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through March 5: The **Tom Harrell Big Band.** The acclaimed trumpeter Harrell loves to put together all manner of ensembles: his big band may be his most ambitious. He has a sunny, Latin-tinged side to his writing, but his most satisfying compositions and arrangements call on darker, Mingus-like tones that he exploits to startling effect. Mondays belong to electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (576-2232)—March 1-5: The **Benny Golson** quartet. Tenor saxophonist Golson, with his brawny tone, full-throttle energy, and impeccable credentials (the Jazztet, Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers), is a genuine hard-bop hero. He's also one of the greatest of jazz composers, with at least three classics to his name: "I Remember Clifford," "Whisper Not," and "Stablemates." Only an occasional visitor to the city, Golson allows a lot of time in his set for New Yorkers to savor what they've been missing. Dining.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—The broadminded reeds player **Matt Darriau** is one of New York City's most eclectic musical visionaries. During this four-night stand (March 2-5), he devotes one night to each of his various ensembles, starting with **Ballin' the Jack,** which explores Duke Ellington's early "jungle" repertoire. The following night he hot-wires familiar idioms until they assume fresh forms with his **Recycled Waltz Orchestra. Celtic Eclectic,** which warps the folk music of the British Isles, takes over after that. He closes his run with the Eastern European strains of his **Paradox Trio.** March 3: The **David S. Ware** quartet. Ware's recent association with Sony Records hasn't elevated the neo-free-jazz tenor saxophonist to jazz-superstar status. No surprise. Ware still traffics in a rough-edged music that gives conservative listeners the heebie-jeebies. The departure of his imaginative and resourceful drummer, Susie Iberra, has hurt, but Ware still has a highly empathetic supporting cast in pianist **Matthew Shipp** and bassist **William Parker.**

ON AND OFF THE AVENUE

Tips on Hats

In 1960, the year of the first bareheaded Presidency, there were more than three hundred hatters in the Manhattan Yellow Pages. Today, only a handful are left. At one of the survivors—**JJ HAT CENTER**, at 310 Fifth Avenue, which opened in 1911 and is the city's oldest continuously operating hat shop—the proprietor Aida O'Toole is running through the universal laws of hats. For example, "The biggest reason men come to purchase a hat," she says, "is that they left one exactly like it in a cab." As a customer fusses over a gray fur-felt Borsalino fedora ($235), O'Toole reiterates her central thesis: hat men are "eccentric, extremely confident people who aren't worried about what other people think."

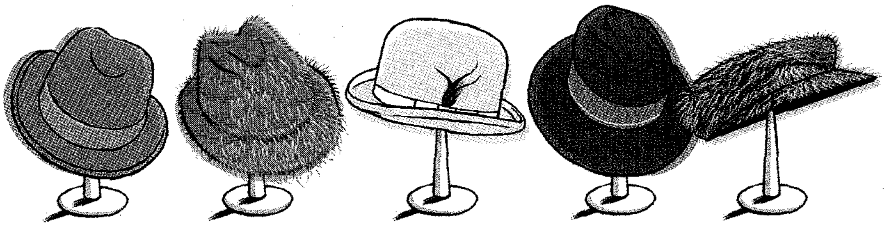
Then, as if on cue, a customer walks in. He's dressed in twill jodhpurs, knee-high boots, and a six-button waistcoat with a rose-gold watch fob. He carries a gold-handled walking stick, and, as he passes the vintage hat-box display and the vitrines stacked with Stetsons and Biltmores, he unbuttons a single-breasted frock coat, made in 1902 for Dr. Sam Bank of Chicago. The man turns out to be a vintage-clothing collector who has come to pick up an Irish roadster ($65), the kind of hat worn with goggles back in the days of horseless carriages.

JJ's gilt ceilings and crystal chandeliers cultivate an atmosphere of bygone gentility that seems to go with buying—and wearing—a certain kind of hat. But downtown at **BURANELLI'S** (at Ludlow and Delancey Streets), there is more of a common-man feel. The owner, Gino Buranelli, has a hard-knock business philosophy ("fast nickels instead of slow dollars") and a rough-and-tumble approach to headgear. He pulls hats from the crammed shelves—a Basque waterproof beret ($35), an all-weather Aussie travelling hat ($39.95)—presenting each one delicately. Then, without warning, he mashes a hat between his palms. As the hat uncrumples, he punches the crown, and, presto, the headpiece pops back into shape.

At **ARNOLD HATTER'S**, at 620 Eighth Avenue, between Fortieth and Forty-first Streets, Arnold Rubin and his son Mark, third- and fourth-generation hatters, have a fondness for the bad old days around Times Square. "What comes in now is families. They don't want a red fedora. They want a Yankees cap," Mark says. Arnold takes down a soft-crown Stetson ($100) and begins to run through the repertoire of shaping instructions that every hatter used to know. "Here's the center crease. With a pinch. The teardrop. The acey-deucey-trey. The single snake, the double snake. You used to be able to tell what neighborhood a guy came from by the way he wanted you to steam his hat."

Autographed head shots of the happily hatted—boxers, jazzmen, hip-hop artists, ventriloquists, Yiddish actor Fyvush Finkel—ring the main room of Arnold's, which houses more than three thousand hats and caps (in the fall and winter styles alone). Only a small fraction of the total stock (approximately a hundred and sixty hats) is on display in the front window, and passersby can identify favorite items from handy nameplates—the Astor ($70), the Furgora Spitfire ($45), the leather Fiddler ($27), the Kangol Pagoda ($35), the Biltmore Grand Beaver Homburg ($250). Even a plain derby shows its colors: lime, lemon, orange, and grape. "You got a baseball cap in this joint?" one customer asks, pointing to a fuzzy hat in the popular Furgora line. When Mark produces one, the patron nods. "Give me all the flavors you got."

—*Kevin Conley*



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MAKOR

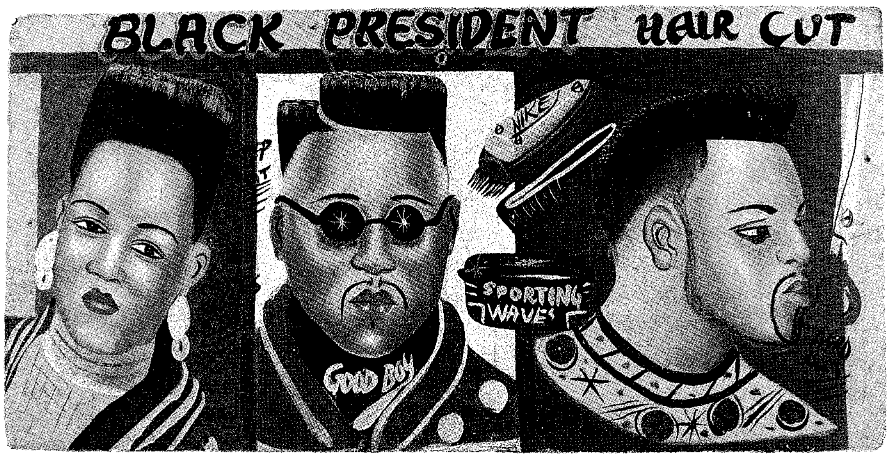
35 W. 67th St. (601-1000)—March 1: The **Marc Cary** trio. His apprenticeship with the late singer Betty Carter and subsequent sojourn as a smart and alert sideman have helped pianist Cary blossom into a highly promising stylist and leader. He's developed an enviable rapport with bassist **Taris Matin** and drummer **Nasheed Waits.**

SWEET BASIL

88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—The **Fort Apache Band** (through March 5) grafts its steaming Latin sensibility onto Coltrane-era modal vamps; leader Jerry Gonzalez is a virtuoso conga player and a steadily maturing trumpeter, and his brother Andy is the most prominent bassist on the Latin-jazz scene. Dining.

VILLAGE VANGUARD

178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through March 5: The **Dave Douglas** sextet. The downtown trumpeter Douglas has infiltrated the mainstream jazz clubs before, but this first-time engagement at the most venerated jazz establishment in the world reflects glory on him and exhibits encouraging signs for the broadening spectrum of the Vanguard's booking policies. Douglas's sextet is not the most daring of his many eclectic projects. The trumpeter's recent album, "Soul on Soul," with its respectful reworkings of Mary Lou Williams's compositions, displays a strong traditionalist streak, one that reminds us of Douglas's roots as a young bebop virtuoso. But almost everything that this extravagantly creative bandleader presents is a vividly reimagined vision of what contemporary jazz can be. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.



A contemporary Ghanaian barbershop sign, from "Hair in African Art and Culture."

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—Signs of wear on small limewood carvings of Mary and the baby Jesus memorialize five-hundred-year-old "caresses and kisses of worshippers," according to a label in the Metropolitan Museum's **"Tilman Riemenschneider: Master Sculptor of the Late Middle Ages,"** a show of some sixty works in wood and stone by the German artist (and his school) who, amid the Northern Renaissance, brought Gothic style to a peak of elegance and eloquence. It helps to imagine those caresses. The sculptor's religious figures appear restrained to the verge of impassivity, though swathed in ravishing, intricate draperies that can seem stirred by divine winds. In truth, the works evoke pure raptures of medieval piety. For many, the perfect art of this unfamiliar master comes as a major discovery. Through May 14. ♦ **"Walker Evans,"** a comprehensive retrospective, the photographer's first. Through May 14. ♦ **"The World of Scholar's Rocks."** Through Aug. 20. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—**"Places"** and **"Things,"** two parts of the tripartite **"Modern Starts"** exhibition, offering works drawn from MOMA's permanent collection, all focussed on the years 1880-1920, continue through March 14. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—With green laser beams ricocheting through a six-story waterfall, and hundreds of TV screens providing ambient noise and light, the Nam June Paik retrospective looks, from ground level, like a sure-fire crowd-pleaser. Instead it leaves one disenchanted and puzzled. A surprisingly meagre selection of works, casually charming installations that pair TV sets with fish, candles, or plants, fill the museum's long, spiralling ramp. At the top of the rotunda, photographs of Paik's early performances have a frisson of glamour, thanks to his collaborator Charlotte Moorman's willingness to take off her clothes. For the most part, though, the father of video art comes off as an unexpectedly slight figure, a likable, playful avant-gardist whose imaginative resources have seldom matched his commitment to the idea of innovation. Through April 26. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—Selections from the permanent collection are on display. (Open Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

Central Park W. at 79th St. (769-5100)—The Hayden Planetarium, in the new glass-sheathed Rose Center, looks like what might have arisen if Sony had commissioned I. M. Pei to build the Centre Pompidou. Space Show tickets, designed as 3-D postcard-size "passports to the universe," let you enjoy a twenty-minute cosmic journey, narrated by Tom Hanks, which goes from Earth to the Milky Way out to the Virgo Supercluster, then through a black hole right back home. You can cruise the new building, size up exhibits that boggle the mind with postulations like "On this time line, each step you take is seventy-five million years long," and watch a mini star show that begins, "Hello and welcome to the big bang. I'm Jodie Foster." Reservations for regular Space Shows are advised, and available at 769-5200. ♦ **"Body Art: Marks of Identity."** Through May 29. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART

Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—The latest installment in the museum's **"Working in Brooklyn"** exhibitions showcases artists' books, including examples by Louise Bourgeois, Meg Belichick, Janet Zweig, and Peggy Doody. Through April 16. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

ASIA SOCIETY

502 Park Ave., at 59th St. (288-6400)—**"Spiritual Perfection."** The Asia Society débuts its interim space (during renovations, the Society will use the old Christie's digs) with an introduction to South and Southeast Asian religious sculpture. The old auction room is packed with serene Buddhas, elephantine Ganeshas, raging and peaceful Shivas, and buxom Female Celestial Entertainers. If you've ever wondered why some deities have more than two arms, enlightenment is here. If you knew already, you may agree with one grumpy connoisseur's remark in the guest book: "Curating childishly simple." Through April 1. (Open Mondays through Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GROLIER CLUB

47 E. 60th St. (838-6690)—**"Remembering John Ruskin."** For the centenary of his death, a bibliographic portrait of the great Victorian know-it-all, mostly taken from the collections of Harvard's Houghton Library and R. Dyke Benjamin. Beginning with his first published pieces, which appeared when their author was still a teen-ager, the exhibition traces the course of his multifaceted career through pamphlets, tracts, correspondence, and an assortment of beautifully printed and annotated books. There are also some delightful caricatures of the sage himself, and a small group of Ruskin's own drawings and watercolors, including a ring of glistening cherries that one feels tempted to pop into one's mouth. Through April 29. (Open daily, except Sundays, 10 to 5.)

MORGAN LIBRARY

29 E. 36th St. (685-0008)—**"From Bruegel to Rubens: Netherlandish and Flemish Drawings"** is a scholarly and engrossing show, featuring nearly a quarter of the library's superb collection of Northern drawings. Michelangelo famously carped that Northern artists cared for nothing but detail, but it's easy to share their fascination when looking at these hundred or so passionately delicate, information-packed pages. Among the standouts are a panorama of frolicking ice-skaters by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, and a range of marvellously meticulous mountain scenes, drawn by artists, such as Jacques de Gheyn, who had never travelled outside the lowlands. Among the later works, sketches by Rubens and his pupil Van Dyck show sleeping animals, nudes, and tangles of figures apparently dashed off at lightning speed. Here, detail has been suppressed in favor of a disciplined fluidity, at once perfectly lithe, dynamic, and boastful. Through April 30. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5; Fridays, 10:30 to 8; Saturdays, 10:30 to 6; Sundays, noon to 6.)

MUSEUM FOR AFRICAN ART

593 Broadway (966-1313)—You could study **"Hair in African Art and Culture"** to learn how important coiffure is to traditional African life, or else you could just check out the really cool hair styles. A surprising lesson pairs thirties field photos with masks and sculptures to make the point that the far-out abstractions adored by the modernists were often naturalistic depictions of ceremonial hairdos. But it's sheer vitality that makes this show so appealing: we see Cameroonian hairdressing (the woman getting her hair twisted into tiny braids looks a lot grumpier than the woman doing the twisting) and an entire barbershop transported from Ghana, complete with slick, airbrushed ads for the latest styles. One grinning mask from the Cross River region in Nigeria has giant braids corkscrewing out with such exuberance that you've got to hope the look catches on here. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10:30 to 5:30; Saturdays and Sundays, noon to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

PABLO PICASSO

A print exhibition devoted to a single theme: the artist contemplating his model/muse/mistress. Sometimes the setting is a studio, sometimes a cabaret or a brothel. But the action is always the same: hungrily, tenderly, diffidently, Boy stares across the page at Girl. Boy appears under a variety of guises—squat, balding Spaniard; bearded Greco-Roman patrician; even Degas. Girl, meanwhile, is a veritable Rolodex of physiognomies, shifting at will from Marie-Thérèse to Dora to Jacqueline. Through March 11. (Krugier, 41 E. 57th St. 755-7288.)

Short List

MARCO ARCE
Galeria Ramis Barquet, 41 E. 57th St. 644-9090. Through April 1.
PETER BEGLEY
Salander-O'Reilly, 20 E. 79th St. 879-6606. Through March 25.
MAURIZIO CATTELAN
Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 977-7160. Through March 25.
JOSEPH DI GIORGIO
Kouros, 23 E. 73rd St. 288-5888. Through April 1.
HELEN FRANKENTHALER
Ameringer Howard, 41 E. 57th St. 935-1110. Through March 11.
BRIAN SHURE / JOAN LINDER
Perlow, 41 E. 57th St. 644-7171. Both shows through March 9.
ROBERT SMITHSON
Cohan, 41 W. 57th St. 755-7171. Through March 4.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

CHRISTOPHER CHIAPPA
Laugh-out-loud shtick as conceptual art is an American tradition, as any Charles Ray fan will attest. Chiappa joins the lineup with photographs and sculptures ranging from the sophomoric "Lisa Mona," in which a wet T-shirt, emblazoned with the artist's visage, clings to a hot babe, to the hysterically blasphemous "Lazy Boy Crucifix," for those long sits at the right hand of the father. Chiappa's best work has the irresistible appeal of a pratfall, though his worst will make you wince—did we mention the rungless ladder? Take my show, please. Through March 11. (Fredericks Freiser Gallery, 594 W. 22nd St. 633-6555.)
SANTI MOIX
Like modernist armadas floating in tropical lagoons, this Barcelona-born painter's biomorphic improvisations drift across fields of brushy, luxuriant blueness. The blue areas occupy the upper and lower portions of each canvas, but it's the linked, complicated forms between them that seize one's attention. Brusquely painted, they line up, each odd shape built around some sort of pith, seed, nipple, or iris. There are precedents for this kind of sky-and-sea abstraction—Ernst, Miró, and Guston come to mind—but nothing that quite anticipates the macabre serenity, and distinctive beauty, of Moix's images. Through March 11. (Kasmin, 293 Tenth Ave., at 27th St. 563-4474.)
"SUPERORGANIC HYDROPONIC WARFARE"
This three-person show of drawings by painters is tidily summed up by its title (though it sounds like a bad band name). Alex Ross is superorganic, with his blue-green planetary blobs that look like earth-science textbooks on ecstasy. David Dupuis is hydroponic, drawing juicy drops with lapidary precision, and Carrol Dunham, the elder statesman of the group, is warfare, giving marching orders to scribbly, cartoonlike figures. Through March 11. (Derek Eller, 529 W. 20th St. 206-6411.)

Short List

HALUK AKAKÇE
Urbach Architecture, 526 W. 26th St. 627-0974. Through March 11.
ALEXANDRA FEIT
Clementine, 526 W. 26th St. 243-5937. Through April 1.
JOSIAH MC ELHENY
Sikkema, 530 W. 22nd St. 929-2262. Through March 25.
KRISTEN OPPENHEIM
303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 255-1121. Through March 18.
UGO RONDINONE
Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 243-2000. Through April 15.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

H. C. WESTERMANN
As a Marine in the Pacific theatre during the Second World War, H. C. Westermann witnessed a series of horrifying kamikaze attacks. His own ship returned to Pearl Harbor with the dead stacked on deck, and the U.S.S. Franklin, hit a few days earlier, was still in port, too hot to board, smelling of burned flesh. Westermann's "Death Ship" sculptures, collected here, make use of the similarity in shape of boats and coffins. One model rests in the depths of a leather-lined box, with two small dorsal fins emerging from the lid. Of the prints and drawings on view, one neat reversal stands out, a Steinbergian picture, in pen, ink, and watercolor, of a battleship bearing down from the sky on a small plane in the middle of a deserted airstrip. Through March 4. (Lennon, Weinberg, 560 Broadway. 941-0012.)

Short List

LUCIO FONTANA
Sperone Westwater, 142 Greene St. 431-3685. Through March 25.
JUDY FOX / KATHARINE KUHARIC
P.P.O.W, 476 Broome St. 941-8642. Both shows through March 25.
SIMON FROST
Blum, 99 Wooster St. 343-0441. Through April 1.
KELLY E. LAMB
Brownstone, 39 Wooster St. 334-3455. Through April 1.
TIM NOBLE AND SUE WEBSTER
Deitch Projects, 76 Grand St. 343-7300. Through March 25.
NEO RAUCH
Zwirner, 43 Greene St. 966-9074. Through March 18.
LINDA STOJAK
Haller, 560 Broadway. 219-2500. Through March 28.

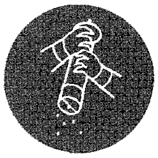
AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

CHRISTIE'S EAST
An auction of wines. (219 E. 67th St. 606-0400. March 4.)
SWANN
Books about travel and navigation. (104 E. 25th St. 254-4710. March 2.)
WORKS ON PAPER
An obligatory annual visit for collectors of prints, drawings, watercolors, and posters. (7th Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. March 2-5. For more information, call 777-5218.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

GREGORY CREWSDON
Crewsdon stages these surreal color tableaux with a Hollywood-worthy production crew; his credits list lighting, set, and costume designers, along with coördinators of aerial operations and taxidermy. One picture peeks out a front window at a pregnant woman standing on the lawn in her underwear—alone amidst the alien bungalows. Through March 25. (Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24. 206-9100.)
MARTINE FRANCK
This Dutch-born photographer and photojournalist's characteristically streamlined 1976 shot of bathers beside a pool could be a still from a French version of "8½"; Franck shares Fellini's talent for playful, sexy black-and-white. Through March 4. (Greenberg, 120 Wooster St. 334-0010.)
ROBERT PARKEHARRISON
The artist appears in each of these sepia composites, wearing the same substantial sideburns, pin-striped suit, and quixotic expression, whether he's sewing up a crack in the earth or rolling an outsized Selectric typewriter ball across a misty landscape. Through March 4. (Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St. 517-3766.)
JÖRG SASSE
Modern pictures of modern architecture—color snapshots appropriated, digitized, and cropped to create landscape compositions, hung alongside a group of tightly focussed details of institutional décor, i.e., a few square feet of ceiling tile. Through March 18. (Lehmann Maupin, 39 Greene St. 965-0753.)

TABLES FOR TWO



PRUNE
54 E. First St. (677-6221)—Restaurant-goers who are unaware of the origins of this downtown café's unappetizing name (it's the childhood nickname of the chef and owner, Gabrielle Hamilton, who hails from New Jersey but cooks more like a French countrywoman) might think, Um, no thanks. A more appropriate title for the place might be Raisin: it's dark and tiny, with pure, distinctive flavor and a sweet personality.

Twelve craft-paper-topped tables, a battered zinc bar, and the open kitchen are wedged into one cramped but charming storefront space, adorned with French lace curtains and antique mirrors and dimly lit by plain votives and painted light bulbs. The fare, most of which is served on wooden dishes with unmatched silverware, is so simple that ambitious food snobs with big kitchens will claim that it's the kind they can turn out at home. That's all well and good for them, but for everyone else it's more than just a guilty pleasure to let Hamilton whip up one of her homey but refined starters of devilled eggs, pickled shrimp, baby radishes with fresh sweet butter and coarse salt, or a round of marinated goat cheese and red onion served with slices of buttered bread.

If you ask the waiter which of the hardy entrées you should have, the gorgeous-looking short ribs with Yorkshire pudding or the special pork chop with thick-cut bacon and braised chard, he'll look at you intently, as if reading your mind, then give his forecast: both are very good, but the special is special—a perfectly grilled, juicy chop topped with smoked tomatoes that you shouldn't miss; you'll come back for the ribs, anyway. The mixed grill—a distinctly flavored assortment that includes a duck sausage, a pork sausage, a rare lamb chop, and a nicely gelatinous chunk of French-style uncured bacon, served with homemade prune mustard—is a good example of Hamilton's rustic elegance. The sea bass, though, is overpowered by *berbere*, an Ethiopian spice blend. Of the side dishes, a mélange of cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, and baby turnips is earthy and tasty, as are the buttery potatoes three ways. This isn't food for the cholesterol-conscious, but the big bitter-greens salad, a tangle of watercress and arugula, makes an astringent follow-up. Though Prune doesn't yet have a liquor license, the hostess, whose funky manner fits the crowd (she's like a Mary Tyler Moore for the downtown set), will open your wine and bring you jelly jars to drink it in. Getting a reservation takes some doing. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays for dinner. Entrées $10-$21.)

GARY SCHNEIDER
Via electron microscope and X ray, Schneider magnifies and records his biological matter, including hair, DNA, and sperm. The show includes negatives and platinum and chromium prints. Through April 9. (International Center of Photography, 1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. 860-1777. Open daily, except Mondays, 11-6, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

"PICTURING GUATEMALA"
More than a century's worth of images from the archives of CIRMA (Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica), including cartes de visite, funerary portraits, plantation promotions, and photographs of an execution during the Estrada Cabrera regime. Through April 16. (Americas Society, Park Ave. at 68th St. 249-8950.)

Short List

LEE FRIEDLANDER
Borden, 560 Broadway. 431-0166.
Through March 18.

WILLIAM GEDNEY
Gallery 292, 120 Wooster St. 431-0292.
Through March 4.

LOUISE LAWLER
Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St.
206-7100. Through March 4.

ANNIE LEIBOVITZ
Houk, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St.
750-7070. Through March 4.

DUANE MICHALS
Pace/MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 759-7999.
Through March 4.

MARVIN E. NEWMAN
De Lellis, 47 E. 68th St. 327-1482.
Through March 25.

AARON SISKIND
Mann, 42 E. 76th St. 570-1223.
Through March 18.

PATRICK TOSANI
Zabriskie, 41 E. 57th St.
752-1223. Through March 4.

"THE ART OF THE DAGUERREOTYPE"
Morthland, 225 10th Ave., at 23rd St. Through March 18.

See the museum listings for a photography exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
"Madama Butterfly," with Michele Crider, Wendy White, Sergej Larin, and William Shimell; conducted by Julius Rudel. (March 1 at 7:30 and March 4 at 8.) ♦ **"La Traviata,"** with Patricia Racette, Stuart Neill, and Anthony Michaels-Moore; Roberto Abbado. (March 2 and March 6 at 8.) ♦ **"La Cenerentola,"** with Jennifer Larmore, Raúl Giménez, Alessandro Corbelli, Simone Alaimo, and John Relyea; Bruno Campanella. (March 3 at 8.) ♦ **"The Merry Widow,"** presented in English, with Frederica von Stade, Emily Pulley, Plácido Domingo, Paul Groves, and John Del Carlo; Andrew Davis. (March 4 at 1:30.) ♦ With Timothy Nolen instead of Mr. Del Carlo. (March 7 at 7:30.) ♦ Note: On March 5 at 3, Paul Nadler conducts the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra in a concert featuring the ten finalists of the company's National Winners Awards. (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA
The opening week of the company's spring season, which continues through April 23, introduces a new production of "Porgy and Bess," a work which has not been presented by the company since 1965. (New York State Theatre. 870-5570. March 3 at 8, March 4 at 1:30 and 8, March 5 at 1:30, and March 7 at 6:30.)

"DER WEG DER VERHEISSUNG"
Kurt Weill's four-part Biblical drama, in a production that originated last June, at the Chemnitz Opera, in Germany. John Mauceri conducts the Robert Schumann Philharmonic Orchestra (from Chemnitz), choirs from Germany and Poland, and a large cast of soloists. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. March 1 and March 3-4 at 7:30 and March 5 at 3.)

AMATO OPERA COMPANY
Presenting "Manon." (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 228-8200. March 4 at 7:30 and March 5 at 2:30. Through March 26.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Kurt Masur conducts Ives's "The Unanswered Question," Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4 (featuring Murray Perahia), and Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 2 (the "Little Russian"). (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. March 1-4 at 8.)

AUGUSTANA CHOIR
This collegiate a-cappella choir from Illinois performs Bach's "Lobet den Herrn" and Casals's "O Vos Omnes," among many other works. Jon Hurty directs. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. March 1 at 8.)

BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Seiji Ozawa conducts Britten's "War Requiem," with soprano Christine Goerke, tenor Ian Bostridge, baritone Thomas Quasthoff, the Tanglewood Festival Chorus, and a Boston children's choir. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. March 1-2 at 8.)

NEW AMSTERDAM SINGERS
Clara Longstreth directs Britten's "Cantata Misericordia" and Missa Brevis, in addition to works by Schubert, Beethoven, Holst, John Crawford, and Joelle Wallach. (St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. March 2 and March 4 at 8. For information about tickets, call 568-5948.)

DANISH NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
The Danish composer Poul Ruders wrote his "Concerto in Pieces" in 1995 to celebrate two milestones in the history of English music: the tercentenary of the death of Henry Purcell and the fiftieth anniversary of the première of Benjamin Britten's "Variations on a Theme of Purcell" (better known by its subtitle, "A Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra"). Ruders's work was also supposed to be a set of Purcell variations, but, as the composer recalled, "if I wanted to come out of this thing alive, I'd have to choose a Purcell theme as far away in shape and nature as possible from the marvellous one Britten selected. . . . For me to choose the same tune, well, I'd just as well jump out the window." In the end, he settled on the "Ho–Ho–Ho" witches' chorus from "Dido and Aeneas," which goes through nine variations and a fugue (each spotlighting a different group of instruments), making "Concerto in Pieces" a modern counterpart to Britten's classic. Yuri Temirkanov, the orchestra's principal guest conductor, leads it in this concert, which also includes Brahms's Violin Concerto (with Pamela Frank) and Nielsen's Symphony No. 4 (the "Inextinguishable"). (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. March 3 at 8.)

JUPITER SYMPHONY
Jens Nygaard conducts an all-Beethoven program: his "Coriolan" Overture, Violin Concerto (with Paul Rosenthal), and Symphony No. 5. (Mason Hall, Baruch College, Lexington Ave. at 23rd St. 802-5661. March 3 at 8.)

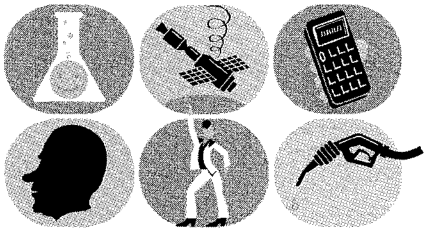
PHILHARMONIC VIRTUOSI
Richard Kapp leads an all-Mozart program. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. March 4 at 7.)

CHICAGO SYMPHONY
At Carnegie Hall, Daniel Barenboim conducting. March 4 at 8: Mozart's C-Major Piano Concerto (K. 503, with Mr. Barenboim doubling as soloist) and Bruckner's Symphony No. 4. ♦ March 5 at 2: The first New York performance of "What Next?," Elliott Carter's rather surreal opera about the aftermath of an automobile accident, which was premièred last September in Berlin. The cast for this concert version comprises sopranos Lynne Dawson and Simone Nolde, contralto Hilary Summers, tenor William Joyner, and baritone Hanno Müller-Brachman. Completing the program is Falla's "The Three-Cornered Hat." ♦

BOOK CURRENTS

Back to the Me Decade

According to the **HISTORICAL DICTIONARY OF THE 1970S** (Greenwood Publishing), disco music was "characterized by very heavy, throbbing rhythms and sexual themes" and it "petered out in the 1980s." That last point is debatable, but other entries in this retro reference book show just how passé the past has become: Pocket Calculator, Skylab, Stagflation, Fischer-Spassky, and, of course, CB Radio, which once represented the fastest-growing sector of the communications industry.



NIGEL HOLMES

Still, as several new books about the seventies suggest, the urge to define and explain the decade that spanned from the Kent State killings to the mass suicide in Jonestown is still very much with us.

In the sweeping, contentious **HOW WE GOT HERE: THE 70'S** (Basic Books), the conservative pundit David Frum argues that the "spider-plant decade" ushered in nearly every problematic aspect of modern life, from irony and radical feminism to divorce and raspberry-flavored vinegar. In **THE SEVENTIES: THE AGE OF GLITTER IN POPULAR CULTURE** (Routledge), the decade's "cultural production" is reëxamined in essays by critics and historians, including Anne-Lise François, who offers an exegesis of Carly Simon's "No Secrets" album cover, and Charles Kronengold, who dissects the opening credit sequence of the film "Shaft."

The importance of image in the seventies is at the heart of **STARSTRUCK** (Dilettante Press/DAP), a fascinating collection of snapshots taken by Gary Lee Boas, a shy but persistent Stage-Door Johnny. In Boas's scrapbook, everyone from Henry Winkler to Julie Christie to Ronald Reagan is democratized by bad hair and flashbulb-induced red eyes, suggesting that while the polyester decade is remembered as a hedonistic, paranoid time, it was also a time when celebrities retained a certain innocence.

—*Mark Rozzo*

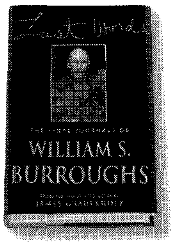
Books.

[AT BARNES & NOBLE]

We Have What Moves You

LAST WORDS: THE FINAL JOURNALS OF WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS

edited by James Grauerholz



Rare insight into the complex psyche of America's most noted literary outlaw comes in the form of Burroughs' last personal journals. During his final months, the author of *Naked Lunch* deconstructs U.S. drug policy and other favorite targets as he reveals the uncharacteristic vulnerability of an old man. (Grove Press)

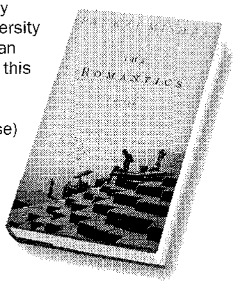
Pub. Price: $25.00

Discount **20%**

Our Price: $20.00

THE ROMANTICS

by Pankaj Mishra



Conflicting worlds collide in India's holy city of Benares when an innocent university student hooks up with a fellow Brahman agitator and a group of westerners. In this atmospheric debut, east meets west, contemporary defies traditional, and the results are volatile. (Random House)

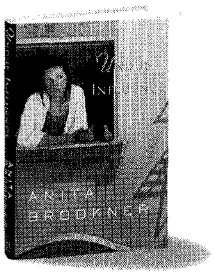
Pub. Price: $23.95

Discount **20%**

Our Price: $19.16

UNDUE INFLUENCE

by Anita Brookner



The Booker Prize-winning author of *Hotel du Lac* pleases fans with a charming new tale that explores the drama of attachment through the unexpected and complicated affair between a lonely London bookstore clerk and a mysterious married man. (Random House)

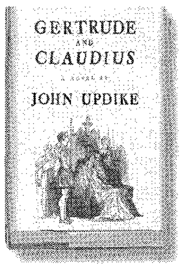
Pub. Price: $24.00

Discount **20%**

Our Price: $19.20

GERTRUDE AND CLAUDIUS

by John Updike



In his nineteenth novel, the two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning author takes on the Bard himself. In an imagined prequel to *Hamlet*, sparked with trademark wit and insight, Updike examines the dysfunctional Danish monarchy. (Knopf)

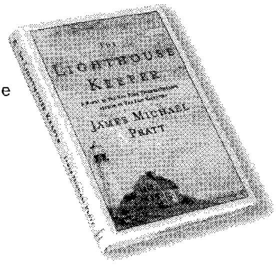
Pub. Price: $23.00

Discount **20%**

Our Price: $18.40

THE LIGHTHOUSE KEEPER

by James Michael Pratt



The power of faith comes shining through in the simple tale of a lighthouse keeper and the nephew whom he raised like a son. When World War II and a tragic death strike Peter O'Banyon's world, he learns the true wisdom of the beliefs learned at his uncle's knee. (St. Martin's Press)

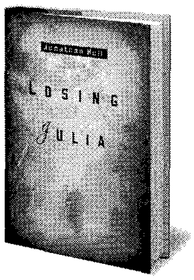
Pub. Price: $23.95

Discount **20%**

Our Price: $19.16

LOSING JULIA

by Jonathan Hull



Patrick Delaney fell in love with his best friend's girlfriend when he heard her letters read aloud in the trenches of World War I. As an old man, Patrick's diary merges his romantic obsession and war memories into a moving tale of love and death. (Delacorte Press)

Pub. Price: $24.95

Discount **20%**

Our Price: $19.96

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March 6 at 8: Boulez's "Notations I-IV" and "Notation VII," in addition to Mahler's Symphony No. 5. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800.)

PHILHARMONIA HUNGARICA
This orchestra's name invites the assumption that it comes from Hungary; in fact, it was created as an orchestra-in-exile at an Austrian refugee camp full of Hungarian musicians fleeing the People's Revolution of 1956. For its first three years, the orchestra remained homeless, but in 1959 the Federal Republic of Germany invited the group to settle in Marl kreis Recklinghausen, a mouthful of a town in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia. It remains there to this day, a jewel in the cultural crown of an otherwise gritty industrial region. In this concert, Justus Frantz conducts Haydn's Symphony No. 94 (the "Surprise"), Liszt's Piano Concerto No. 1 (featuring Sergio Tiempo), and Beethoven's Symphony No. 7. (Whitman Theatre, Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts, Brooklyn College. 718-951-4500. March 5 at 2.)

ACADEMY OF ST. MARTIN IN THE FIELDS
Kenneth Sillito leads Bach's "Brandenburg" Concerto No. 3 and Concerto for Three Violins (BWV 1064, a speculative attempt to recapture what may have been the original version of what has come down as the C-Major Concerto for Three Harpsichords), in addition to Schoenberg's "Verklärte Nacht" and Shostakovich's "Two Pieces for String Octet." (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. March 6 at 8.)

ISRAEL PHILHARMONIC
Zubin Mehta, who in his thirty years as this orchestra's music director has presided over it in nearly two thousand concerts, conducts Josef Tal's Symphony No. 1, Beethoven's Violin Concerto (featuring Maxim Vengerov), and Shostakovich's Symphony No. 5. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. March 7 at 7. A benefit concert.)

PITTSBURGH SYMPHONY
In the first evening of a two-day stint at Carnegie Hall, Mariss Jansons leads Rossini's "La Scala di Seta" Overture, Stravinsky's "Petrushka" (in the 1947 version), and Brahms's Symphony No. 2. (March 7 at 8. 247-7800.)

RECITALS

ROBERT WHITE
The tenor, assisted by pianist Melissa Marse, performs an hour-long recital of songs (by Beethoven, Berlin, and others). (Morgan Library, 29 E. 36th St. 685-0008, ext. 347. March 1 at 1.)

DANIEL ROTH
The French organist, who reigns over the loft at the Church of St. Sulpice in Paris, includes in his program works by Duruflé, Tournemire, Mendelssohn, and Bach, as well as several of his own compositions and transcriptions. Flutist Reva Youngstein and organist Stephen Tharp assist him in several ensemble works. (St. Bartholomew's Church, Park Ave. at 50th St. 378-0248. March 1 at 7:30.)

SYLVIA ROSENBERG
The violinist is joined by violist James Dunham and pianist Barry Snyder for chamber music by Janáček, Beethoven, Martinů, and others. (Weill Recital Hall. 247-7800. March 1 at 8.)

EXPLORING SHOSTAKOVICH
The Emerson String Quartet, having just completed its survey of Shostakovich's fifteen quartets, now participates in "The Noise of Time," a new theatre piece about the composer, created by director Simon McBurney and the London-based Theatre de Complicite. (John Jay Theatre, Tenth Ave. at 58th St. March 1-3 at 8, March 4 at 2 and 8, and March 5 at 3. For information about tickets, call 875-5050.)

ARTEK
The early-music ensemble performs forty minutes of Baroque sacred and secular music, by Monteverdi, Schütz, and others. (St. Francis of Assisi Church, 135 W. 31st St. March 2 at 1:15. No tickets necessary.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER
March 2 at 6:45 and 8:30: The Miami String Quartet plays Peteris Vasks's Quartet No. 3; pianist Anne-Marie McDermott joins two of its members for David Rakowski's "Attitude Problems." (Rose Rehearsal Studio, Rose Building, Lincoln Center. For information about tickets, call 875-5788.) ♦ March 3 at 8 and March 5 at 5: Presenting piano trios by Beethoven (in C Minor) and Scott Wheeler, in addition to Brahms's G-Major String Sextet. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050.)

BARGEMUSIC
March 2 at 7:30 and March 5 at 4: Violinist Ida Levin and pianist Diane Walsh perform Mendelssohn's F-Major Violin Sonata and are joined by cellist Peter Wiley for piano trios by Haydn and Fauré. ♦ March 3-4 at 7:30: String quartets by Schubert (in C Minor), Haydn (in F Major, Op. 74, No. 2), and Mendelssohn (in E Minor, Op. 44, No. 2). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061.)

An afternoon of chanteys at the South Street Seaport (see Above and Beyond).

TONY MILLIONAIRE

CARNEGIE HALL MILLENNIUM PIANO BOOK
In the spirit of cultivating the enthusiasm of serious amateurs, Carnegie Hall invited ten composers to write short solo-piano works that might be within the reach of less-than-virtuoso pianists. In this concert, their efforts are unveiled by Ursula Oppens, performing the contributions from Tan Dun and John Harbison, and four student pianists: Ofra Yitzhaki (from the Juilliard School), offering pieces by Milton Babbitt and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich; Kuang-Hao Huang (from Northwestern University), performing pieces by Chen Yi and Louis Andriessen; Kirill Gerstein (from the Manhattan School of Music), with works by Elliott Carter and Wolfgang Rihm; and Kozue Jinnouchi (from the Eastman School of Music), playing compositions by Hannibal (which is what the composer also known as Lokumbe Hannibal prefers to be called) and Frederic Rzewski. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. March 2 at 8.)

NEW MUSIC FOR A NEW CENTURY
John Harbison will apparently have to miss the première of his piano piece at Carnegie Hall, since he'll be ten blocks north conducting this ensemble, which made an impressive showing when it burst onto New York's contemporary-music scene a month ago. In this concert, he leads large-scale chamber works by other composers: John Halle's "Operation Chaos" (a première), Harrison Birtwistle's "Ritual Fragment," Donald Sur's "The Unicorn and the Lady" (for eight instruments and an actor—here, Mark Lamos), and Sebastian Currier's "Vocalissimus" (featuring soprano Haleh Abghari). (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3300. March 2 at 8.)

CHRISTOPHER MALTMAN
In his New York début recital, the baritone, who won the 1997 Lieder Prize at the prestigious Cardiff Singer of the World Competition, performs songs by Fauré, Debussy, and many others, with pianist Malcolm Martineau assisting. (Weill Recital Hall. 247-7800. March 3 at 8.)

MUSICIANS FROM MARLBORO
Participants from the Vermont summer music institute convene to offer chamber Beethoven Piano-and-Winds Quintet, Janáček's "Mládi," Kurtág's Wind Quintet, and Mozart's Serenade for Winds in E-Flat Major (K. 375). (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. March 3 at 8.)

STONY BROOK CONTEMPORARY CHAMBER PLAYERS
Performing Stravinsky's "In Memoriam Dylan Thomas," Carter's Double Concerto for Piano and Harpsichord, and Berio's "Folk Songs" (featuring mezzo-soprano Barbara Kokolus). (Christ and St. Stephen's Church, 120 W. 69th St. March 3 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

ETHOS PERCUSSION GROUP
Performing Cowell's "Pulse," among other works, in a concert that includes an appearance by the Music from China ensemble. (Weill Recital Hall. 247-7800. March 4 at 2.)

SARA DAVIS BUECHNER
March 4 at 7:30: The pianist offers a program of salon morsels, by Paderewski, Chaminade, Rudolf Friml, and others. (St. Peter's Episcopal Church, 346 W. 20th St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ March 5 at 7: Cellist Richard Locker joins her to perform Stravinsky's "Suite Italienne," in addition to sonatas by Gabriel Pierné and Brahms (in D Major, the composer's own cello transcription of his G-Major Violin Sonata). (Christ and St. Stephen's Church, 120 W. 69th St. No tickets necessary.)

ROBERTO HIDALGO
The Mexican pianist performs Carlos Chávez's "Preludes for Piano" (from 1932), in addition to Beethoven's "Eroica" Variations, Medtner's "Sonata Reminiscenza," and several works by Chopin. (Weill Recital Hall. 247-7800. March 4 at 8:30.)

YOSUKE KAWASAKI
The violinist, assisted by pianist Vadim Serebryany, performs sonatas by Beethoven (in A Major, Op. 12, No. 2) and Brahms (in A Major). (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., City Island, the Bronx. 718-885-2478. March 5 at noon.)

GUARNERI QUARTET
Now in its thirty-fifth year, which is to be its last with all four founding members intact, the ensemble plays string quartets by Mozart (in C Major, K. 465, the "Dissonance"), Mendelssohn (in D Major, Op. 44, No. 1), and Ravel. (New School, 66 W. 12th St. 243-9937. March 5 at 3.)

ALL SEASONS CHAMBER PLAYERS
Performing Fauré's C-Minor Piano Quartet and Martinů's Sonata for Flute, Violin, and Piano, among other pieces. (Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church, Madison Ave. at 73rd St. March 5 at 4. Admission by contribution.)

ANNER BYLSMA AND MALCOLM BILSON
The cellist and the pianist, both performing on period instruments, offer Beethoven's Cello Sonatas No. 1 (in F Major) and No. 3 (in A Major), in addition to works by three of the composer's colleagues: a group of études by Jean-Pierre Duport, or possibly his brother, Jean-Louis Duport (one or the other of whom joined Beethoven in performing the première of the F-Major Sonata); Bernhard Heinrich Romberg (a cellist who grew up with Beethoven in Bonn and kept in touch for decades); and Franz Joseph Haydn (who served briefly as Beethoven's teacher, though without much apparent warmth on either side). Presented by Music Before 1800. (Corpus Christi Church, 529 W. 121st St. 666-9266. March 5 at 5.)

AMY BURTON
The soprano is joined by her husband, the pianist and composer John Musto, for a performance and discussion of songs from both the classical and the popular traditions, including pieces by Mr. Musto. (Joe's Pub, at the Public Theatre, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200. March 5 at 6.)

CHAMBER PLAYERS OF THE LEAGUE/I.S.C.M.
Presenting six works by Mario Davidovsky, including his String Quartets No. 4 and No. 5 and his "Synchronism" No. 1 for Flute and Tape. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. March 5 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

WORKING FOR A SONG
Back before jet engines reduced transatlantic navigation to a few hours with a blinking control panel and a headset, a trip between New York City and points abroad meant long weeks getting tossed about on a sailing ship. Sailors turned to singing to help pass the time and, more important, to get the work done (the main machinery aboard, other than canvas and rope, was muscle and bone; work songs helped sailors coördinate their efforts in such arduous tasks as setting sails and raising the anchor). "It was a laborious job, and chanteys tended to lighten the load," says Dan Milner, the founder of the twelve-member singing group the New York Packet, which will break out "The Handsome Cabin Boy," "Little Sally Rackett," "Sally Brown," and a number of other chanteys and forebitters during an afternoon focussing on the role of women in the songs. The program also features a special performance by the female a-cappella group the Johnson Girls. (Melville Gallery, South Street Seaport, 213 Water St. March 5 at 3. Tickets at the door.)

READINGS
March 3 at 7: By poets William Corbett and Elaine Equi. (Dia Center for the Arts, 548 W. 22nd St. 989-5566.) ♦ March 7 at 8: By writers and Rilke translators William Gass, Galway Kinnell, Rika Lesser, and Edward Snow, from the work of the German lyric poet. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100.)

TALKS
March 1 at 6: Shirley Hazzard, author of "Greene on Capri," talks about the novelist Graham Greene and his time in Italy. (Celeste Bartos Forum, New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. 930-0571.) ♦ March 2 at 6:30: New York *Times* science writer Natalie Angier discusses her latest book, "Woman: An Intimate Geography." (Julius S. Held Lecture Hall, Barnard College, Broadway at 116th St. 854-2067.)

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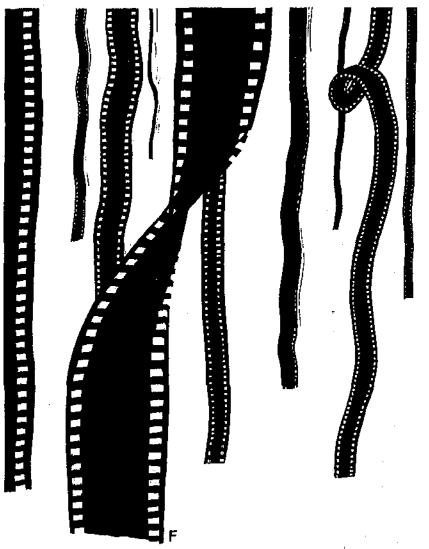


MOVIES OPENING

DROWNING MONA
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening March 3.

GHOST DOG: THE WAY OF THE SAMURAI
Reviewed below in Film Notes. Opening March 3.

HOMO SAPIENS 1900
A documentary by Peter Cohen about the use and influence of eugenics in the twentieth century. Opening March 3. (The Screening Room.)

THE LITTLE THIEF
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening March 1. (Film Forum.)

THE NEXT BEST THING
A straight woman (Madonna) and a gay man (Rupert Everett) have a child together. Directed by John Schlesinger. Opening March 3.

WHAT PLANET ARE YOU FROM?
An alien (Garry Shandling) must seduce Earth women to save his civilization, in this comedy directed by Mike Nichols. Opening March 3.

FILM NOTES

If a movie has been reviewed recently in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given.

THE BEACH
A cautionary tale for travellers, in which Richard (Leonardo DiCaprio) arrives in Thailand, learns of a mythical beach, and makes the elementary mistake of trying to find it. He and his companions swim to Paradise, and soon human malevolence is running high, thanks to the tensions among the happy campers who live by the water. There is the scary Sal (Tilda Swinton) and the charming Françoise (Virginie Ledoyen), both of whom already have boyfriends, and both of whom hit on Richard. (Someone should have explained to them that a crush on DiCaprio is not exactly an unprecedented emotion.) The film skitters along nicely for the first half; from then on, it grows dark and deadly, as Richard—and sometimes the images on screen—start to go mad. (When the whole thing briefly turns into a video game, are we meant to ponder the crowded horrors of Western consciousness, or merely to be annoyed?) The director is Danny Boyle, the screenwriter is John Hodge, and the producer is Andrew Macdonald; together they made "Shallow Grave" and "Trainspotting," and you wonder whether they were wise to quit the Scottish turf they know so well. This movie, which was adapted from the bestselling Alex Garland novel, wants so badly to be a cult film that it forgets to be any good.—*Anthony Lane* (2/14/00) (Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, East 86th Street Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, 62nd & Broadway, and Union Square.)

GHOST DOG: THE WAY OF THE SAMURAI
Part satire, part comic book, Jim Jarmusch's new film is set in a future that's one beat beyond the present and takes place in a generic cityscape called the Industrialized State. Forest Whitaker stars as a hulking, dangerous, yet curiously gentle samurai known as Ghost Dog. He follows the austere precepts of the samurai code but is also partial to gangsta rap and high-tech weaponry. His master is an Italian mob underling who serves a family in hilarious decline: they operate out of the back of a Chinese restaurant and cannot make the rent on their social club. Jarmusch keeps the camera moving slowly, attending to details, and the rap soundtrack by RZA (of Wu-Tang Clan fame) gives the whole undertaking a fuguelike quality. When the movie becomes a showdown between two ancient codes—the samurai and *omertà*—Jarmusch playfully aligns the pretend violence of cartoons with the stylized violence of Hollywood, leading to an enigmatic ending that is thoroughly unnerving. It's like an elaborate joke without a punch line. The setup, though, is worth it, thanks to Whitaker's quiet, powerful performance; in Jarmusch's hands he becomes a beacon of purity in a collapsing world.—*Michael Agger* (Angelika Film Center, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, and Park & 68th Street Cinemas.)

HOLY SMOKE
A mad new movie from Jane Campion, who has forsaken the incisiveness of "An Angel at My Table" and "The Piano" for something close to an acid trip. Kate Winslet plays Ruth, a young Australian woman who travels to India and falls victim to—or, from her point of view, finds peace and poise with—a religious cult. Her family lures her back to Sydney and hires an "exit counselor" to clear out her mind. Given that this counselor is supposed to be the voice of sanity in the movie, it is unfortunate that Campion assigned the role to Harvey Keitel. Winslet, by comparison, seems wholly in control—by turns lucid and lubricious, and always alive to the comedy of the situation. Thank heaven somebody is, because, long before the end, the film drifts into the outback and starts wandering around in circles. The forced weirdness of the imagery and the slightly weary satire of bourgeois existence do not make for an appetizing mix. In fact, the whole thing could use a little exit counselling.—*A.L.* (1/17/00) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Gotham Cinema, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

THE HURRICANE
A very square inspirational movie, factually untrustworthy, about the black boxer Rubin (Hurricane) Carter, a contender for the middleweight crown, who was locked up in 1967 for murders that he did not commit, and who spent years in prison refashioning himself as a lean, ascetic thinker and militant—the icon of the African-American male unjustly incarcerated. As Carter, Denzel Washington offers his usual concentration, quickness, and stern, appraising gaze; he's great, but the movie is a crock, a liberal fairy tale about a black American teen-ager (Vicellous Reon Shannon) and three white Canadian do-gooders (Liev Schreiber, John Hannah, and Deborah Kara Unger) who perform the investigative work that leads to Carter's release. The movie slights the work of lawyers who worked for Carter without fees for years, and neglects to tell us that Carter had been imprisoned once for three muggings before his arrest for the murders. Directed, clunkily, by Norman Jewison; written by Armyan Bernstein and Dan Gordon.—*David Denby* (1/10/00) (Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Union Square, and Waverly.)

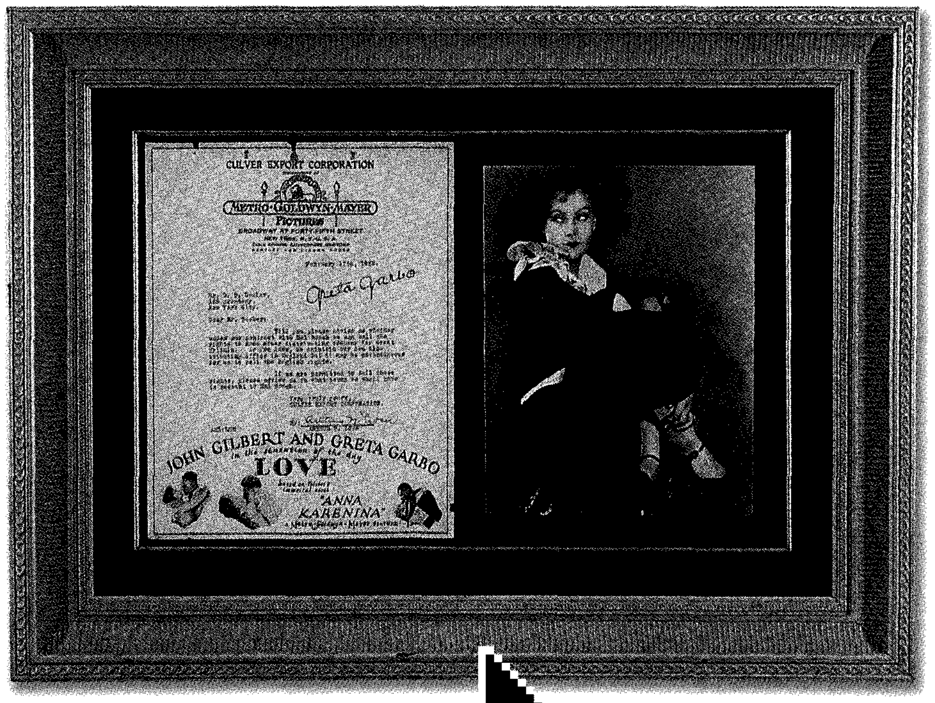
JUDY BERLIN
Suburbia's dysfunction has become such a predictable cliché that adding a solar eclipse to a movie set in Long Island seems a bit like pouring gasoline onto a fire. Despite this astral contrivance, Eric Mendelsohn's movie gives us one of the more resonant depictions of the crabgrass frontier. Edie Falco plays the title character, whose sincere, uncluttered wish to leave town and become an actress in Los Angeles mesmerizes David Gold, who is stagnating at home after a failed attempt at filmmaking. Mirroring their relationship is the one between David's father, a school principal shackled by routine, and Judy's mother, an icy, inhibited teacher. Many of the performances are good; the best is by Madeline Kahn as Mrs. Gold, a housewife who guesses (correctly) that her husband no longer loves her. In the surreal half-light of the eclipse, she wanders through the neighborhood on a self-charted "space walk," letting the conversation in her head spill out onto the empty lawns. Her encounters along the way clue us into her shared isolation: suburbia is a place where everyone spins in their sealed-up emotional orbits.—*M.A.* (State.)

MAGNOLIA
In Paul Thomas Anderson's new movie, the characters break down, fall apart, and denounce themselves and others. "Magnolia" consists of multiple vignettes set in the San Fernando Valley, but since there's no common theme, the picture becomes a kind of mad crackup derby. Much of the material is earnest Arthur Miller-type stuff about how we can't escape the past, we can't escape the evil we've done, we all need to be truthful with one another, and so on. The ideas are banal, but Anderson ("Boogie Nights") plays each sequence in real time and cuts among them with remarkable fluency, and the actors have some tremendous arialike moments—especially Julianne Moore as an adulterous young wife, John C. Reilly as an angelic cop looking for love, and Tom Cruise as some sort of sex guru who hosts a cable-TV show called "Seduce and Destroy." With Jason Robards, Philip Seymour Hoffman, and William H. Macy.—*D.D.* (12/20/99) (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 3rd Avenue, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

A MAP OF THE WORLD
Sigourney Weaver, of the high-altitude clavicle and formidable brow, plays Alice, an intellectual farmwife who, in a moment of inattention, fails to prevent a little girl from drowning in a pond and becomes an enemy of the people. This serious, morally alert adaptation of the nuanced Jane Hamilton novel doesn't allow us to admire its heroine too easily. Alice is unlucky, but, like other bright people trying to live with integrity in a conformist society, she willfully brings trouble on herself, and Weaver makes her vain, haughty, a little scary, and also vulnerable. It's a fine performance, with shades of humor and ruefulness that are new to Weaver's accomplished work as a film actress. With David Strathairn as Alice's husband and Julianne Moore as her next-door neighbor. Screenplay by Peter Hedges and Polly Platt. Scott Elliott is the extremely competent first-time director.—*D.D.* (2/7/00) (Art Greenwich Twin.)

NOT ONE LESS
In a rural Chinese village, a thirteen-year-old student (Wei Minzhi) becomes an emergency substitute teacher. When one of her charges, a ten-year-old boy, leaves to find work in a vast, nameless city nearby, she abandons her post, and sets out to find him. The great Chinese director Zhang Yimou shot this film in a style that might be called austere fabulism. He uses documentary techniques—casting nonactors and presenting the raw concrete walls and dirt roads in all their authentic ugliness. Yet the story is shaped like a fable from the silent-film days, and one gets caught up in it. It becomes a slow-motion chase movie, and the persistence of the young teacher gives the film a tone of hilarious monomania. Intentionally or not (it's hard for an outsider to tell), Zhang reveals the meanness and impersonality of contemporary Chinese society.—*D.D.* (2/21-28/00) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

RED
The last and best film in the trilogy that began with the baffling "Blue" and continued with the more acrid "White." Made in 1994, this film brings all the skills of the director, Krzysztof Kiezs-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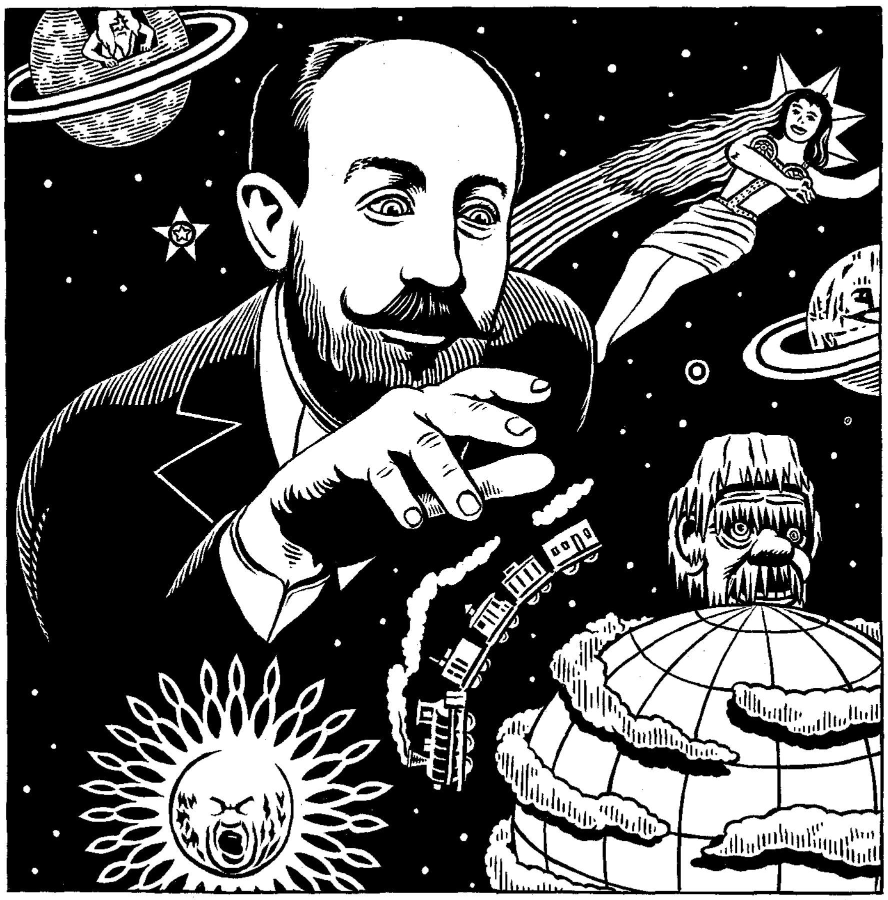


CELLULOID MAGIC *In 1924, Georges Méliès, a pioneer of the French cinema and its first special-effects wizard, was reduced to living in obscurity, selling toys in a Paris subway kiosk. The story of his rediscovery and subsequent canonization is told by Jacques Mény's documentary "The Magic of Méliès," which is being screened at* MOMA *on March 6. After viewing the first film projection of the Lumière brothers, in 1895, Méliès rigged a combined camera and projector and soon progressed from making routine fare to designing frisky phantasmagorias, such as two dirigibles floating a railroad car into outer space, or nubile females coming to life between the panels of an enormous fan. Blending stage illusions and new optical effects (multiple exposure was his most ingenious), Méliès created enduring enchantments.*

MICHAEL KUPPERMAN

lowski, into melancholy play. Blind chance or benign fate (according to your point of view) brings Valentine (Irène Jacob), a young model living alone in Geneva, into contact with a retired judge (Jean-Louis Trintignant) who has a predilection for eavesdropping on telephone conversations. (It's the most authentic route he can find into the mysteries of human behavior.) In time, Valentine's repulsion shades into curiosity, and from there into action. And the movie itself shades from coldness and contrivance into a story as touching and mysterious as anything Kiezslowski has ever made. Trintignant's performance as the misanthropic old man is a portrait of heartbreak, all the more convincing for his character's last-ditch efforts to mend other hearts. At the end, Kiezslowski, too, assumes the mantle of Prospero, magically (and rather absurdly) assembling the trilogy's main players. It's hard to begrudge the master his final flourish. In French.—*A.L.* (Walter Reade Theatre; March 4.)

THE SIXTH SENSE

A delicate, emotionally attentive, but very scary ghost story. In a Philadelphia drained of color and life, a shrink (Bruce Willis) who specializes in childhood anxieties becomes obsessed with one of his patients, a suffering nine-year-old boy (Haley Joel Osment) who "sees" dead people. The movie, written and directed by the young, Indian-born M. Night Shyamalan, consists mostly of long conversations between Willis, who is usually silent and very patient, and Osment, who may be an acting genius. Despite an occasional hackneyed moment, the movie is an admirable attempt at injecting some honest feeling into a curdled commercial genre, and it pays off in the end with a genuine shock that leaves one amazed.—*D.D.* (8/23-30/99) (Criterion Center, East 86th Street Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas.)

THE TALENTED MR. RIPLEY

For his first outing since "The English Patient," the writer and director Anthony Minghella has returned to the roasted light of Italy. The source is Patricia Highsmith's spooky, misanthropic novel of 1955; Matt Damon plays Tom Ripley, her murderous hero, although he lacks the quicksilver elusiveness that the role demands. He is outshone by Jude Law, whose violent disappearance, halfway through the picture, is a grievous wound. Law is sunny, slippery, and pansexual; he might have made a better Ripley himself. In the female roles, Gwyneth Paltrow struggles to find anything much in the stony Marge, whom Highsmith so loftily scorned; more rewarding is the dreamy Cate Blanchett as an heiress named Meredith Logue—a part invented by Minghella. Her fine features are like a flawless period detail in themselves. The film feels warm but unsettled, as if hinting at approaching storms; the score, too, flits from lugubrious to manic. With Philip Seymour Hoffman, perfectly cast once again, this time as another of Tom's victims.—*A.L.* (12/27/99-1/3/00) (East 85th Street, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, and Union Square.)

THIEF

Grandiloquent masochism of the kind an adolescent boy might fantasize. With rain outside and smoke inside, this Chicago-set 1981 movie is almost a parody of film noir: it's the underworld movies of the forties and fifties made volcanic and abstract and existential. This is the first theatrical feature by the writer-director Michael Mann, and he has designed it like a choochoo train to the box office. James Caan is the big-time safecracker who wants to take his bundle and retire, marry, have a nice house, and raise a family. But the corrupt System won't let him. The film is hyper-animated by this conception of existential tragedy: the thief—a loner in pain, the embodiment of a macho mystique—must learn that he's free only when he doesn't care about life and has nothing to lose. Mann belongs to the pressure-cooker school of filmmaking: Tangerine Dream's synthesized electronic music pulsates like mad, and the cinematography (by Donald Thorin) is so snazzy it overwhelms the action. With Tuesday Weld as the dazed, burnt-out woman whom Caan marries and Willie Nelson, oozing sincerity as Caan's only friend.—*Pauline Kael* (Film Forum; March 6.)

TOPSY-TURVY

Mike Leigh's brilliant re-creation of the most famous partnership in the British theatre—the collaboration of W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan in the glory era of imperial rule. There are elements here of a traditional bio-pic—failure, triumph, intimations of immortality—but none of the stodginess and self-congratulation that usually plague the form. Sullivan (Allan Corduner), a libertine who nevertheless had serious pretensions as a composer, and Gilbert (Jim Broadbent), formal, irascible, and asexual, but a great theatrical pro, are so dissimilar in temperament that they can hardly bear each other's company. Leigh suggests that the combination of sentimental languor and incisiveness produced the art of "The Mikado," whose preparation and first performance take up the second half of the movie. The authentic period stage lighting produces a glow on the painted faces; the fragile beauty of Sullivan's tunes is piercing when they are played, as they are here, at slower tempos than we are used to hearing. In all, one of the greatest movies about the theatre. With Lesley Manville, Timothy Spall, Ron Cook, and Wendy Nottingham.—*D.D.* (12/27/99-1/3/00) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Paris, and Village Theatre VII.)

TRASH

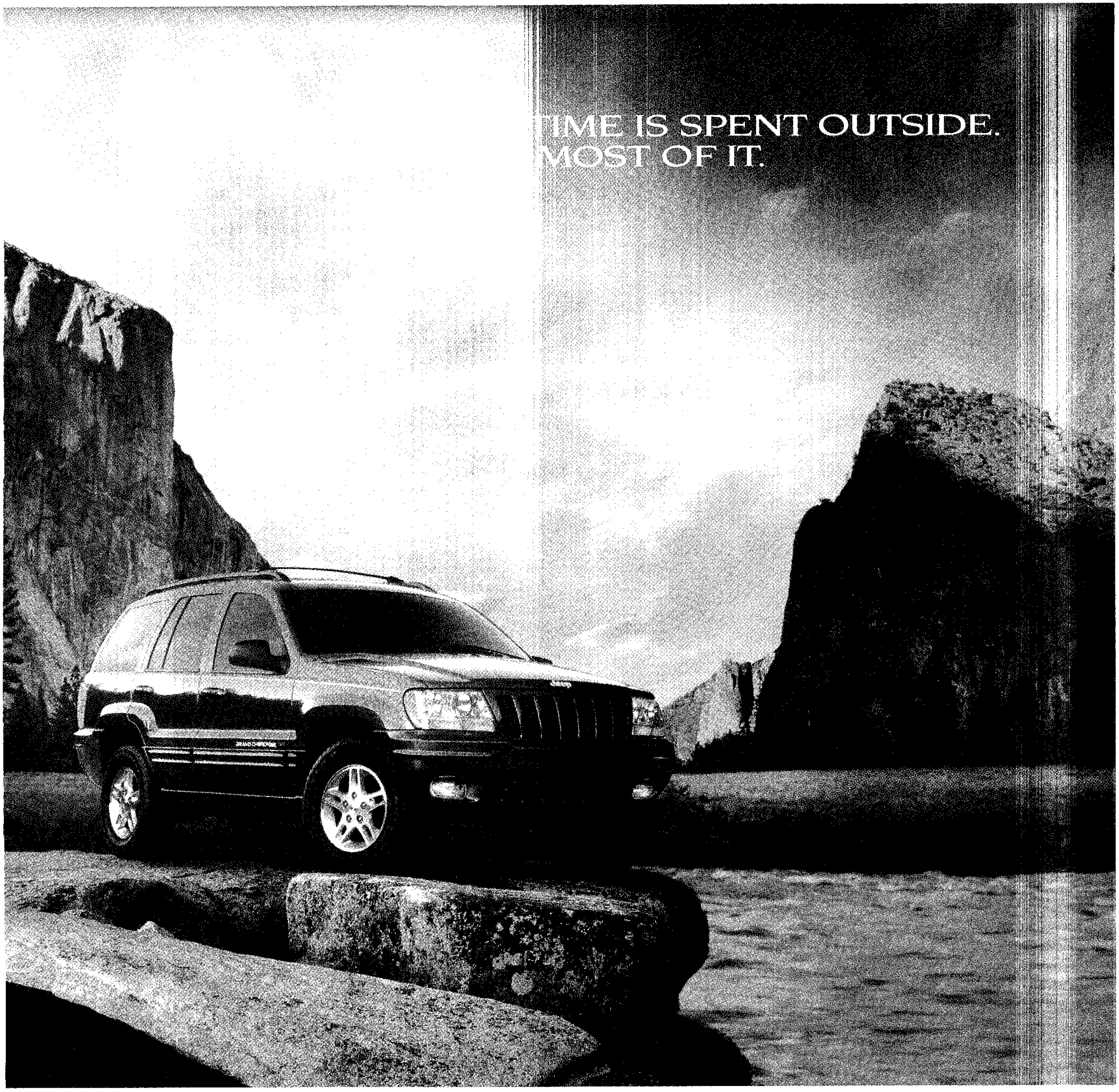
Absurdist 1970 porno-comedy about an impotent junkie (Joe Dallesandro) who drags himself around while various women try to arouse him. His sort-of wife is played by a goofy female impersonator, Holly Woodlawn, whose intensity amidst the general dejection is crazily—and entertainingly—incongruous. The wife's highest aspiration is to get on welfare, and to accomplish this she pretends to be pregnant, but the welfare investigator (Michael Sklar) wants the fabulous-forties shoes that the wife found in the garbage can, and she refuses to give them up. The picture is steeped in a sense of grotesque parody, though most of the time it's as enervated and limp as the hero. The knocked-out couple do their put-on of marriage, and we are invited to laugh at their outcast status and their meaningless lives and to feel sorry for them. This Andy Warhol production was directed by Paul Morrissey, who lingers over needles going into flesh and puts a nimbus around the messiest head of hair. With Jane Forth as the indolent housewife in the modern apartment that the hero tries to burglarize.—*P.K.* (Anthology Film Archives; March 3.)

THE WHOLE NINE YARDS

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Chelsea Cinemas, Coronet Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.)

WONDER BOYS

A pleasant dud from director Curtis Hanson and screenwriter Steve Kloves. Michael Douglas plays



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Grady Tripp, pothead campus novelist and hero to undergraduates, who cannot finish his new book and gets drawn into all kinds of social complications. Douglas gives a surprisingly mild and rueful performance, but the movie has very little dramatic interest and quickly slides into whimsy. The vibrant Frances McDormand is the university's chancellor, with whom Tripp is having an affair; Tobey Maguire is a maddingly elusive writing student who may or may not have talent; and Robert Downey, Jr., drifting through a fey, meaningless performance, is a visiting New York book editor. "Wonder Boys" isn't sloppy; it's been made with love, but one looks at it in bewilderment, amazed that so much care has been taken with desultory material that seems all wrong for the movies. Adapted from Michael Chabon's novel.—*D.D.* (2/21-28/00) (Coronet Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

ALSO PLAYING

ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER (11/22/99)
Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, Eastside Playhouse, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.

AMERICAN BEAUTY (9/17/99)
Beekman, 84th Street Sixplex, Kips Bay Theatre, 19th Street East 6, State, and Village Theatre VII.

BOILER ROOM
Chelsea West, Cinema 1, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, and Village East Cinemas.

BOYS DON'T CRY (10/18-25/99)
East 86th Street Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, Quad Cinema, and 64th and 2nd.

THE CIDER HOUSE RULES (12/13/99)
Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema II, Criterion Center, East 86th Street Cinemas, Gotham Cinema, Kips Bay Theatre, and Lincoln Square.

THE END OF THE AFFAIR (12/6/99)
BAM Rose Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, 64th and 2nd, and Village Theatre VII.

HANGING UP
42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, and Village Theatre VII.

THE INSIDER (11/8/99)
New York Twin, Union Square, and Ziegfeld.

MIFUNE
Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.

PITCH BLACK
Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 72nd Street East, and Union Square.

REINDEER GAMES
42nd Street E Walk, Murray Hill Cinemas, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.

SCREAM 3
84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, 19th Street East 6, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, Sutton 1 and 2, and Village East Cinemas.

SWEET AND LOWDOWN (12/6/99)
First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770).
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Criterion Center, Broadway at 44th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Eastside Playhouse, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Waverly 1 and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—The films of Steve Martin. March 4 at 2: "The Jerk" (1979, Carl Reiner). ♦ March 4 at 4: "Pennies from Heaven" (1981, Herbert Ross). ♦ March 5 at 2: "Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid" (1981, Reiner). ♦ March 5 at 4: "The Man with Two Brains" (1983, Reiner).

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—March 3 at 9: The rerelease première of Paul Morrissey's "Trash" (†). ♦ Four films celebrating the life of Quentin Crisp. March 4 at 4 and March 5 at 7: "Resident Alien" (1990, Jonathan Nossiter). ♦ March 4 at 6: "Homo Heights" (1997, Sara Moore). ♦ March 4 at 8 and March 5 at 5: "The Naked Civil Servant" (1975, Jack Gold). ♦ March 4 at 10 and March 5 at 3: "Orlando" (1993, Sally Potter).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Through April 6: The "Neo-Noir" film festival. March 1-2: "The Long Goodbye" (1973, Robert Altman) and "Harper" (1966, Jack Smight). ♦ March 3-4: "Coffy" (1973, Jack Hill) and "Superfly" (1972, Gordon Parks, Jr.). ♦ March 5: "Pulp Fiction" (1994, Quentin Tarantino). ♦ March 6: "Thief" (†) and "The Driver" (1978, Walter Hill). ♦ March 7: "At Close Range" (1986, James Foley) and "U Turn" (1997, Oliver Stone).

FLORENCE GOULD HALL
55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—March 7 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "Les Amants du Pont Neuf" (1991, Léos Carax; in French).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Through March 7: A tribute to the C.N.C.

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French Film Archives. March 2 at 6 and March 3 at 2:30: “Paris Music-Hall #1” (1933, Kurt Gerron) and “La Vie Parisienne” (1935, Robert Siodmak). ♦ March 6 at 3: “The Magic of Méliès” (1997, Jacques Mény). ♦ March 6 at 6 and March 7 at 2:30: “The Life of the Jews in Palestine” (1913, Noah Sokolovsky). ♦ Through April: “From Automatic Vaudeville to the Seventh Art: Cinema’s Silent Years, 1893-1928,” selections from the museum’s silent-film collection.

PIONEER THEATER

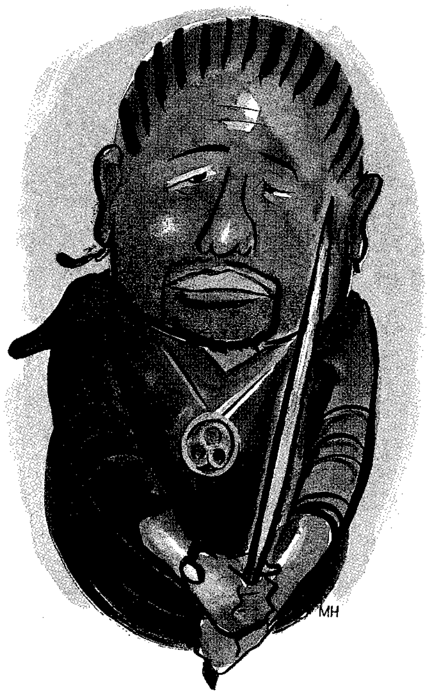
155 E. 3rd St. at Ave. A. (254-3300)—A retrospective of director Robert Kramer. March 2 at 7: “Peoples’ War” (1969) and “Starting Place” (1993). ♦ March 2 at 10: “In the Country” (1967) and “Berlin” (1990). ♦ March 3 at 7 and March 4 at 2: “Ghosts of Electricity” (1997) and “Doc’s Kingdom” (1987). ♦ March 3 at 9 and March 6 at 7: “Walk the Walk” (1996). ♦ March 5 at 2 and March 8 at 7: “Route 1” (1989).

THE SCREENING ROOM

54 Varick St. (334-2100)—March 3-9 at 6:35 and 10:15: “The Jaundiced Eye” (1999, Nonny de la Pena).

SYMPHONY SPACE

2537 Broadway (864-1414)—The films of John Waters and Pedro Almodóvar. March 7 at 7: “Polyester” (1981, Waters). ♦ March 7 at 8:45: “What Have I Done to Deserve This?” (1985, Almodóvar).



Opening March 3, Forest Whitaker in “Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai.”

MARCELLUS HALL

WALTER READE THEATRE

Lincoln Center (875-5600)—The best films of the nineties as selected by *Film Comment*: March 3 at 1 and 8:30: “Dead Man” (1995, Jim Jarmusch). ♦ March 3 at 3:20 and March 5 at 6:45: “Unforgiven” (1992, Clint Eastwood). ♦ March 4 at 4:15 and 10: “Red” (†). ♦ March 4 at 6:15 and March 6 at 10:20: “JLG/JLG” (1995, Jean-Luc Godard; in French). ♦ March 4 at 7:45: “The Wind Will Carry Us” (1999, Abbas Kiarostami; in French). ♦ March 5 at 4:30 and 9:15: “Idiots” (1998, Lars von Trier; in Danish). ♦ March 6 at 1 and 5:40: “The Puppetmaster” (1993, Hou Hsiao-hsien; in Mandarin). ♦ March 6 at 3:30 and 8:20: “Anxiety” (1998, Manoel de Oliveira; in Spanish). ♦ March 7 at 1 and 7:30: “Schindler’s List” (1993, Steven Spielberg). ♦ March 7 at 4:35: “Pulp Fiction” (1994, Quentin Tarantino). ♦ March 8 at 1 and 5:45: “Miller’s Crossing” (1990, Joel and Ethan Coen). ♦ March 8 at 3:15 and 8: “The Age of Innocence” (1993, Martin Scorsese).

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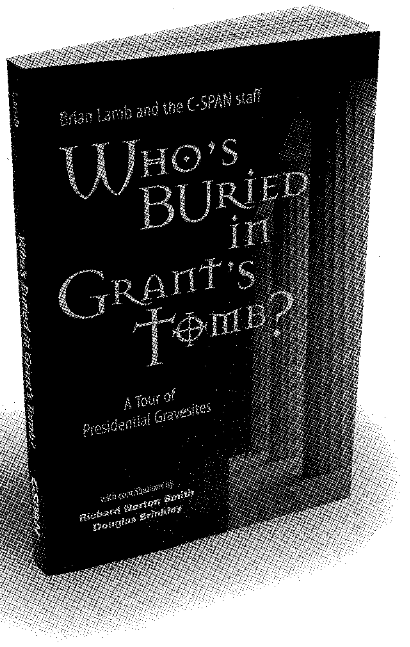
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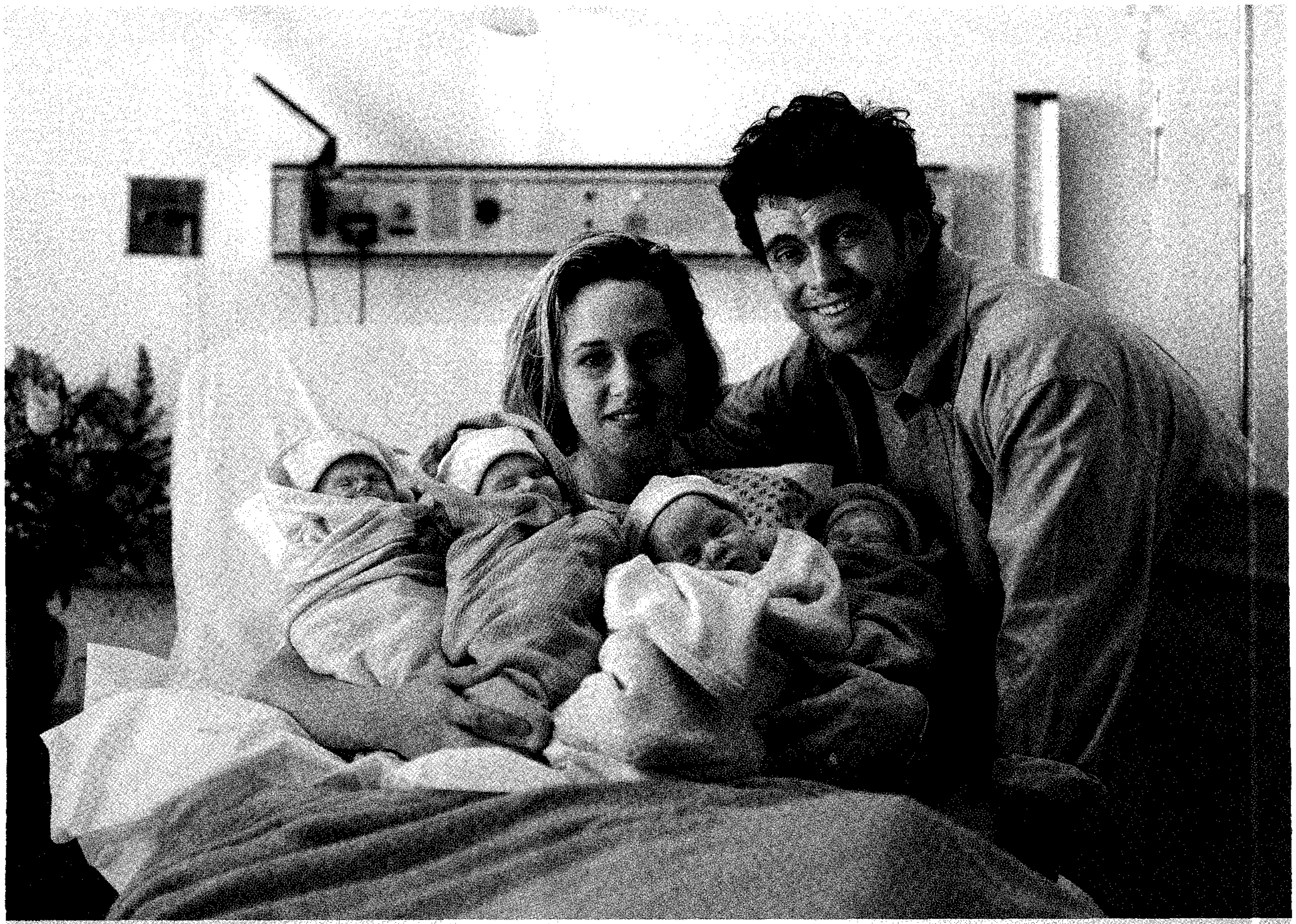

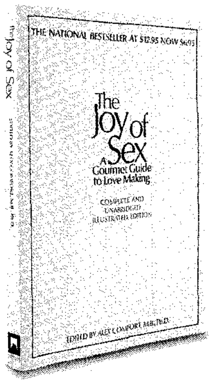
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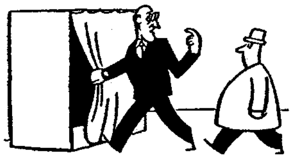
THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
MILLIONS AND MILLIONS



The struggle for the White House took more twists last week. John McCain beat George W. Bush in Michigan and Arizona, and both sides geared up for an apocalyptic Republican spendfest. Al Gore and Bill Bradley, the Democrats, starred in a raucous debate on the stage of the Apollo Theatre, pandering shamelessly to a hooting audience inside the hall and to viewers at home.

It was all very entertaining, but none of it fundamentally changed the line of the story dominating the news. The elements of that story are sadly familiar: the baneful influence of money, which corrupts our most sacred institutions; the notion that it is somehow acceptable to force people to make serious choices on the basis of distorted information gleaned from concocted television spectacles; the promises made to be broken; and, finally, the dark revelations about personal behavior and financial chicanery that sooner or later emerge, giving rise to recriminations and bringing the entire enterprise into disrepute.

But enough about "Who Wants to Marry a Multi-Millionaire?" On to the campaign, a campaign that raises the question: Who wants to *elect* a millionaire, multi or just plain? And will any of us be in a position to vote for a candidate who *isn't* one?

Er, no. All the significant aspirants to a place on the November Presidential ballot (with the eccentric exception of Ralph Nader, the Green Party hopeful, or hopeless) are millionaires at the very least. In part, this reflects the fact that being flush isn't what it used to be: some thirteen per cent of Americans now live in millionaire households, as against less than four per cent a decade ago. In part, it reflects the fact that big-time politics is a career path all but closed to the merely prosperous: just since 1994, the Senate has added eleven millionaires to its rolls. One thing the wealth of the candidates does *not* reflect is the entrepreneurial spirit of the new cyber-economy. The richest of the group, Bush, came by his fortune through family connections. Bradley got his in one branch of show business, Pat Buchanan in another. McCain, ever ahead of the curve, married a multimillionaire. Gore is the only non-multi in the bunch; still, thanks to a combination of thrift (he is not one to throw away cash on charitable contributions) and inheritance, he makes the cut.

None of these people are financing their own campaigns; all are well off, but none are in Ross Perot's league, or Steve Forbes's. Their personal wealth merely affords them the leisure to raise the enormous sums a Presidential campaign requires. It is widely assumed that the public has been desensitized to the issue of campaign finance by a general Gilded Age atmosphere, in which the weekend grosses of new movies are scrutinized more carefully than their reviews. Coverage of the aftermath of New Hampshire focussed on how much money the Senator from Arizona was raising over the Internet, as if he were a new I.P.O. And what did it matter that Bradley's support among Democrats, nationwide, was a fraction of Gore's, when he was raising funds at a faster rate? The sonorities of the speeches seem ever more irrelevant. Liberalism versus conservatism? This campaign often feels more like Lucent versus Cisco (or mccain2000.com versus a very well capitalized Yahoo from the great state of Texas).

Opinion and exit polls appear to confirm the theory that campaign-finance reform sways few voters. Perhaps the issue's real salience lies elsewhere. One of the mysteries of the season has been why

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

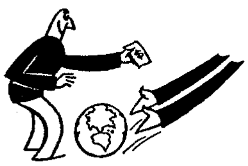
the organized right is so frothingly hostile to McCain, whose claim to be "a proud Reagan conservative" is amply supported by his voting record. In the current issue of the *American Prospect*, John B. Judis offers a solution to the puzzle. After the Republican takeover of Congress five years ago, Judis writes, conservative organizations turned increasingly toward a strategy based on fund-raising rather than on grass-roots citizen action. They formed an alliance with business lobbyists, who provide "soft money" to Republican campaign committees, which in turn funnel millions of dollars in "educational" contracts to outfits like the National Right to Life Committee. This cozy arrangement would be upended by McCain's proposal to ban soft money. Hence the denunciations of McCain (often in the form of "issue" ads) as an abortion-symp, a "Marxist," and, worse, a liberal.

By the end of last week, the rerun of "Who Wants to Marry a Multi-Millionaire?" had been cancelled. The bride, who has begun annulment proceedings, assured the public that no sexual intercourse had been allowed to mar the honeymoon. As a competing form of "reality programming," the Presidential campaign is arguably not quite so sordid. The difference is that annulment will not be an option. Whomever the American people decide to hook up with come November, the relationship is sure to be well and truly consummated. Caveat emptor.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

WALL STREET FOLLIES

MURDOCH FLIRTS WITH A BILLIONAIRE HALF HIS AGE

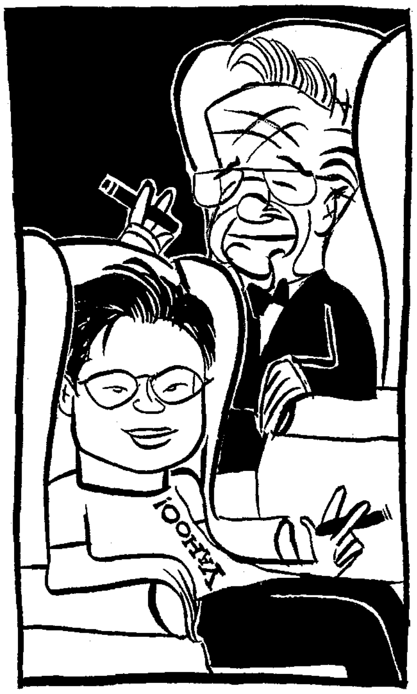


At first sight, Rupert Murdoch and Jerry Yang don't appear to have much in common except their immense wealth. Murdoch, the sixty-eight-year-old chairman and chief executive of News Corporation, is old media incarnate, at once a newspaper baron, a film-studio mogul, and a television-network owner. Jerry Yang, the thirty-one-year-old co-founder of Yahoo!, is the nearsighted Stanford nerd who, with his friend David Filo, set out to provide a list of interesting sites on the World Wide Web and ended up creating an Internet company valued at close to ninety billion dollars. But appearances can deceive. Since America Online and Time Warner announced that they were coming together in the second-largest corporate merger ever, the media industry—new and old—has changed. These days, it resembles nothing so much as an old-fashioned barn dance: new-media maidens lined up against the wall, gazing quizzically at the suitors before them; old-media graybeards moving up and down the line in an increasingly anxious search for a friendly face.

This courting process will doubtless produce romances of all kinds, from one-night stands to happy-ever-after marriages. One of the first relationships to be announced is likely to be a linkup between News Corp. and Yahoo! In recent weeks, Yang has held several meetings with Murdoch's No. 2, Peter Chernin. Nothing has been finalized, but a person familiar with the talks confirmed that the two companies are discussing a wide-ranging alliance, in which News Corp. would provide access to Yahoo!'s popular Web sites via its global satellite systems, while Yahoo! would use News Corp.'s products, such as the Fox News Channel and the London *Times*, as a major source of content for its sites. (News Corp.'s digital-media arm, which is overseen by Murdoch's youngest son, James, already provides Yahoo! with some content.) The two companies would remain separate—at least for now—but would take sizable financial stakes in each other's assets.

Both parties have strong reasons to make this deal. For Murdoch, teaming up with Yahoo! would be the latest, and boldest, move in his effort to reposition News Corp. as a new-media company. In the mid-nineties, News Corp. spent tens of millions of dollars in a fruitless attempt to develop an Internet portal of its own, called iGuide. Since that failure, Murdoch has concentrated his efforts outside the United States, developing satellite-television systems in Europe, Asia, and Latin America. He is convinced that wireless access to the Internet is the future, especially in the developing world, and he sees News Corp.'s satellite-television systems as the first global platform for providing digital television, streaming video, and Internet services. He is planning to spin off the satellite systems as a new company, with News Corp. retaining a majority shareholding, and several strategic partners taking smaller, but still substantial, stakes. Ideally, Yahoo! would become one of these partners. (The others could include Microsoft, which is vying to provide the software needed to run the next generation of set-top boxes for satellite television and Internet access.)

Yahoo!, which claims to have more users than any other Internet company, has always prided itself on its independence. The company has no intention of entering a full-blown merger, but it does want to line up some old-media allies. "We have to make sure we have partners going forward," Yang said during a recent interview at Yahoo!'s headquarters, in Sunnyvale, California. "Partners may mean a business deal; it may mean a strategic relationship; it may mean we acquire other people when it makes sense." Yang refused to talk about specific plans, but he said that his goal remains the same as when he founded Yahoo!, almost six years ago. "What I'm interested in is making sure that people have access to the most interesting content through Yahoo!," he said.



Jerry Yang and Rupert Murdoch

If the Murdoch-Yahoo! deal goes ahead, it will likely be in the form of a stock swap, with Yahoo! exchanging some of its own, highly rated shares for stock in News Corp.'s new satellite divi-

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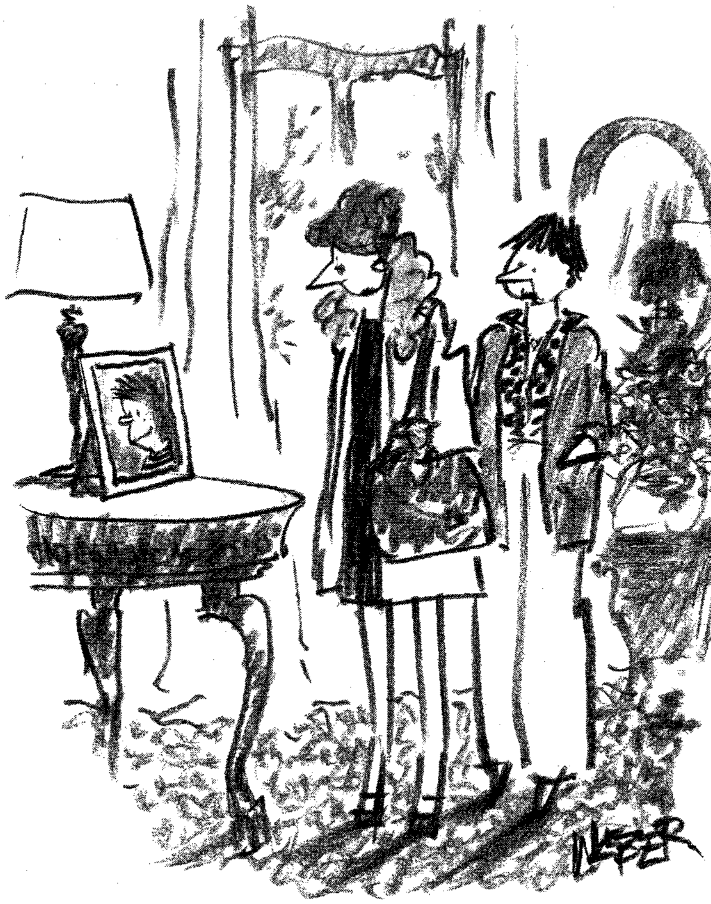
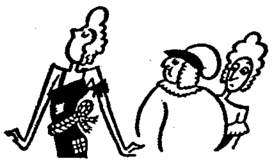


"He's at that awkward age when they can try him as an adult."

sion. Such a deal would demonstrate that Murdoch, the man responsible for "Who Wants to Marry a Multi-Millionaire?," remains as irrepressible as ever. It would also show, if more evidence were needed, that, despite the giddy promises of the techno-libertarians, the new-media world is going to end up looking very much like the later years of the old-media world, with a handful of giant conglomerates controlling the vast majority of information.

—*John Cassidy*

RADICAL CHIC DEPT.
THE HEIRESS AND THE ANARCHISTS



Last month, when the winter sales were at their most inviting, Elaine Broadhead, the heir to a Chicago mail-order fortune, was exactly where she was brought up to be: at Neiman Marcus. But Broadhead, whose brassy auburn hair and black jeans make her appear much younger than her sixty-odd years, was not at Neiman's—the one on Washington's Wisconsin Avenue—to shop. She marched in a circle on the sidewalk and carried a picket sign. Along with a tiny band of animal-rights activists who were protesting the store's decision to stock fur coats, she could be heard shouting, "Compassion—not fashion!"

In an era of centrist politics, when it is sometimes hard to tell the Republicans from the Democrats, it's not easy to be radical. But Broadhead has not given up. Recently, she has embraced a nonviolent guerrilla action group called the Ruckus Society, which is devoted to the concept of "creative confrontation." Broadhead not only helps fund the Ruckus Society; she has transformed Glen-Ora, her hundred-and-fifty-acre Middleburg, Virginia, estate, into a training camp for the Berkeley-based group. It was on the hay fields at Glen-Ora that the Ruckus Society organized the various underground groups who turned the Seattle meeting of the World Trade Organization two months ago into days of rioting against global corporate hegemony.

One recent afternoon, an hour before Broadhead was to leave on a trip to Cuba (the country's name is stamped on the license plates of her Land Rover), she sat down before a fire in Glen-Ora's panelled library to explain how she came to support an anarchist organization. First, however, she let slip that John and Jacqueline Kennedy had relaxed in this same cozy room in 1961, just after Kennedy was elected President, when they rented Glen-Ora from her mother.

"The Ruckus Society has more imagination than most people in politics," she said. "They talk about issues I've been talking about for years, such as the concentration of corporate power." Politics, she thinks, should be full of fun and passion. "The Presidential candidates that I see look like they're sleepwalking!" she complained.

John Sellers, who is now the director of the Ruckus Society, first met Broadhead five years ago, when she attended a rally in Washington, D.C., to protest French nuclear testing in the Pacific. Sellers was leading a delegation from Greenpeace and was wearing a white protective jumpsuit and goggles, and Broadhead asked him if he had an extra outfit. "Here was this quirky woman, dressed to the nines," he recalled recently. "She looked as if she should be shopping on Fifth Avenue. Then she threw on this radioactive white suit and goggles."

Not long after, Sellers joined the brand-new Ruckus Society as a "trainer," and Broadhead began loaning Glen-Ora to the group for its "spring-break camps." At a training session held there last June, Ruckus's leaders announced that they were planning a mass protest at the W.T.O. conference and, according to Sellers, began drilling "tons and tons" of activists in the civil-disobedience techniques that they would use there. They learned how to form blockades, how to rappel up the sides of buildings in order to hang protest banners, how to shackle themselves to large objects, and how to get arrested while declaiming well-rehearsed sound bites to the news cameras.

"I loved having them here," Broadhead said of the Ruckus members. "They

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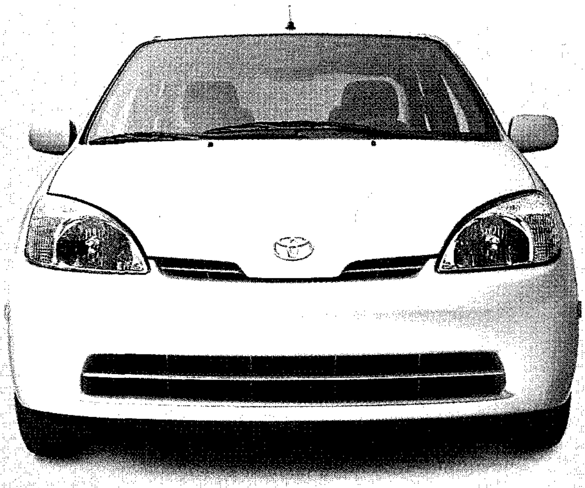

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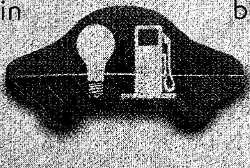

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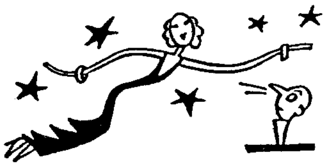
are wonderful, fun, and brave!" Moreover, she added, "they promised to bring me back some rubber bullets from Seattle."

The W.T.O. uprising, Sellers says, was just a beginning. On April 16th and 17th, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund will hold their annual spring meeting in Washington, D.C., and he's hoping to stage "a Seattle-style convergence." Sellers sees the irony in accepting support from what he calls "individuals of means" to help tear down the capitalist state. "We do stand for redistributing income," he said. But so does Broadhead: she gives away about half a million dollars a year, mostly to radical leftist groups like Ruckus. "It's nice to be rich," she said as she headed toward the airport to catch her plane. "I would never argue otherwise. But the great thing about giving some away is that it makes me feel less guilty about my portfolio."

—Jane Mayer

THE BOARDS
EARTHA KITT BEFORE COFFEE



One morning several weeks ago, George C. Wolfe, the protean forty-five-year-old playwright ("The Colored Museum," "Spunk"), director ("Angels in America," "Bring In 'Da Noise, Bring In 'Da Funk"), and head of the Public Theatre, welcomed a number of guests to the theatre, down on Lafayette Street, to have a look at four numbers from his new show, a musical version of Joseph Moncure March's 1928 poem "The Wild Party." The show, which is set to open on April 13th, and which Wolfe directed and co-wrote the book and lyrics for, concerns—well, a wild party, where all sorts of Jazz Age show-biz folk and non-show-biz folk engage in all sorts of debauchery and skulduggery while looking for love, usually expressed in 4/4 time, with lots of big, choreographed gestures. With a couple of big gestures of his own, the ebullient director, dressed in a pullover and dark slacks, waved away the dingy rehearsal hall and performers dressed in their rehearsal togs and said, "Imagine you are in a big fabulous theatre with brilliant lighting and brilliant décor and brilliant costumes. And, because you are brilliant, I know you'll see the ways in which our brilliance shines. O.K.! Let's go!"

A tinkling on the piano. A funky drum. Big and small Fosse-like movements from the dancer-singers as they sang "Queenie was a blonde . . . ," and loads of great flirting and innuendo from the just-Oscar-nominated punk-haired actress Toni Collette, who plays Queenie, the object of a lot of tension in the show, sexual and otherwise. Applause. A cameraman in the audience said to a reporter, "She may look like she's in 'Hair,' but she's giving us 'Oh! Calcutta!' "

A change of scenery. A divan and ferns to set off the splendor of Miss Eartha Kitt as Dolores Montoya. Dressed in black tights, black T-shirt, and a black head scarf, Miss Kitt took the floor, and did more than suggest the character she's meant to play—an over-the-top vaudevillian—by performing her song, "Moving Uptown," with feline ferocity. Great applause. Murmured apologies from Miss Kitt about her imagined lack of perfection. More applause. No change of scenery. Toni Collette singing a sad song, followed by Mandy Patinkin leading the cast with great verve in a raucous song called "Gin," which is all about the perverse pleasure one should take in getting sozzled and not giving a damn. Friendly, supportive applause from the audience; touching, vulnerable expressions on the performers' faces as they took a bow.

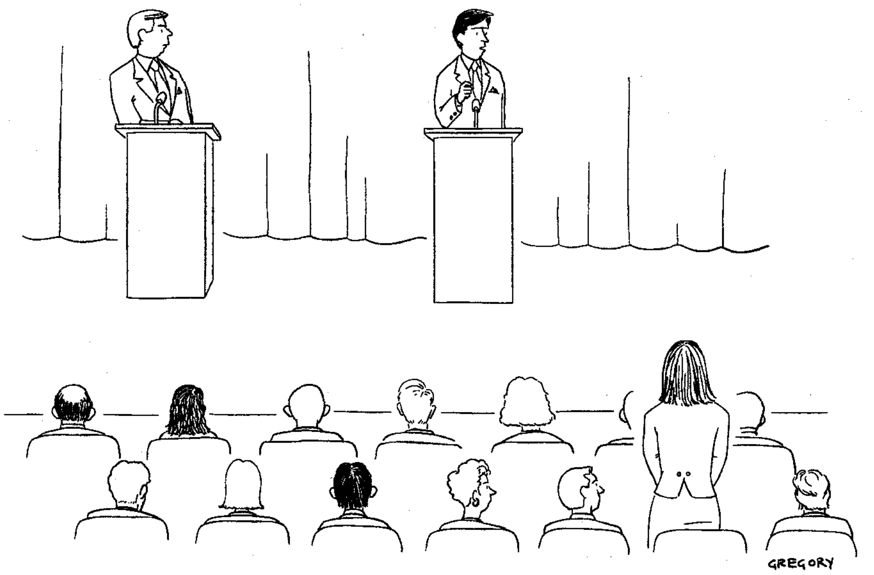
"Was it really all right, darling?" Miss Kitt asked a reporter later, as she draped a firm, shapely leg over his knees, thereby disturbing his notebook. "I mean, I can't believe we had to do this *in . . . the morning!* It's the crack of dawn. I'm always prepared, I get up early and walk the dogs. I knew I was coming in from my home in Westchester—they sent a car—but perhaps I wasn't as warm as I should have been? Perhaps a bit more wicked? I haven't been on Broadway since 'Timbuktu,' in 1978, and I want this to work. I want perfection. I'm always auditioning. It *was* all right, wasn't it?"

A fan remarked that Miss Kitt looked exactly the same as she had more than fifty years before, when she was a young dancer with Katherine Dunham's famous troupe. She smiled. "Darling," she said. "When I left that company, they had to replace me with five people. I did everything! Played the bongos. Recited. Sewed costumes. Everything!"

"Five people?" her admirer asked.

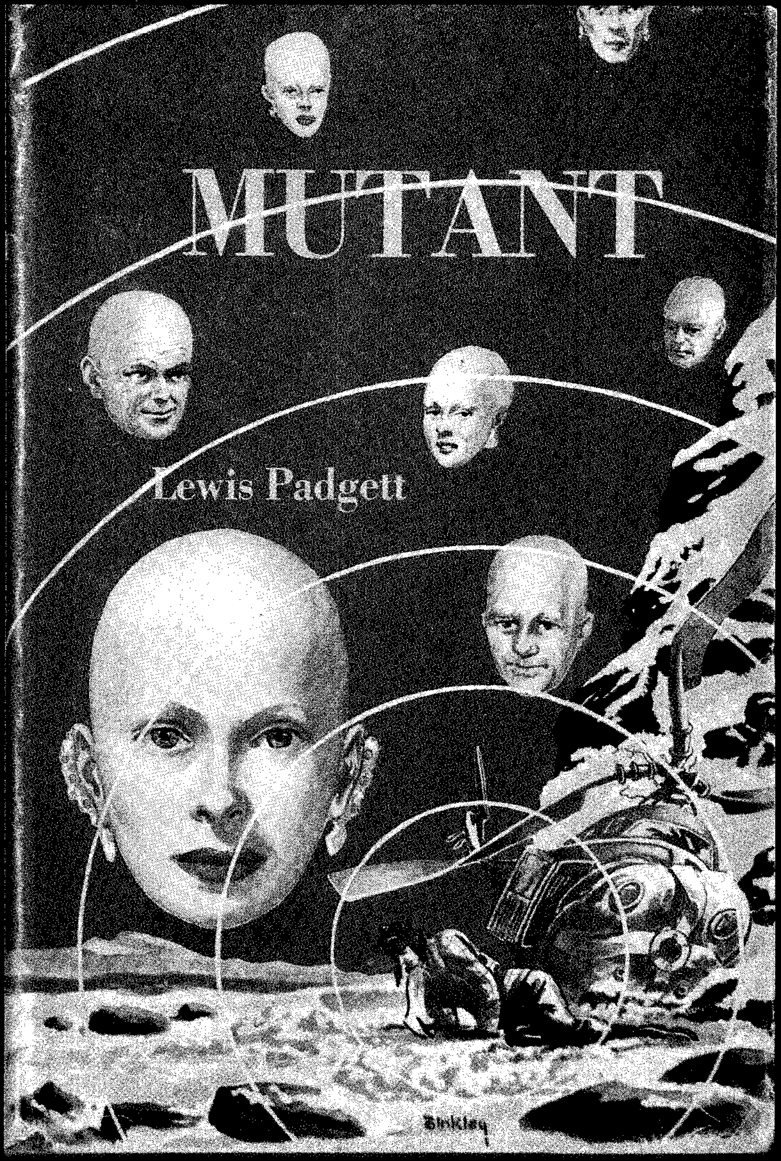
Smiling her famous Cheshire-cat smile, Miss Kitt looked around at her audience, which was mostly male. "Well, darlings, if not five then at least three! It's impossible for me to lie."

—Hilton Als



"That's an excellent prescreened question, but before I give you my stock answer I'd like to try to disarm everyone with a carefully rehearsed joke."

April 11, 1977. Freaked you out so bad you had to bury it.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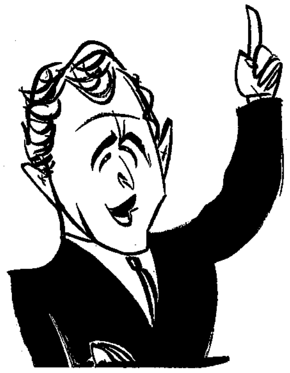
THE EDDIE HASKELL RESPONSE

History will record that the Eddie Haskell Response—a diabolically saccharine innovation in American politics—was first deployed by that master of umbrage-taking Vice-President Albert Gore. It was unveiled in New Hampshire, in late January, when—after months on the receiving end of Gore's attacks on the substance of his proposals—Bill Bradley, belatedly, struck back, complaining in a debate that Gore was twisting his ideas and that, indeed, the Vice-President had a history of stretching the truth a bit. Gore was just *astonished* by the personal nature of this assault, confirming a spiritual kinship noted long ago by Maureen Dowd in the New York *Times*. The Vice-President can do a fair imitation of Eddie Haskell, the teen-age conniver on "Leave It to Beaver" who turns choirboy whenever he is in the presence of adults. "Look, Bill," he said sweetly. "We can have a disagreement on the substance of the issues without making negative personal attacks. The people out there are tired of that."

Gore won New Hampshire. And the Haskell Response was soon adopted by George W. Bush in South Carolina. The Governor of Texas was terribly offended when John McCain said, in a televised advertisement, that Bush "twists the truth like Clinton." Staring directly, mournfully, into the camera in a very effective advertisement, Bush said, "Politics is tough, but when John McCain compared me to Bill Clinton and said I was untrustworthy, that's over the line. Disagree with me, fine, but do not challenge my integrity."

Bush, of course, had already launched one of the ugliest negative campaigns in memory—most of it promulgated by surrogates, particularly soulmates of the giddy Virginia tele-charlatan Pat Robertson. "I've never seen anything like it," says Michael Graham, who describes himself as a "screeching, wild-eyed conservative" radio-talk-show host on WSC in Charleston. "It was a hundred per cent negative from the start. Every last Bush ad was negative. There was organized phone-calling to my show: McCain had collaborated with the North Vietnamese, fathered illegitimate children, his wife was a drug addict. I had admired Bush's compassionate conservative message, but I wound up voting for McCain, just to keep it close—I didn't want the people of South Carolina, who shouldn't be allowed near a ballot box without adult supervision, to decide this for the rest of the country."

McCain's response to Bush's Haskell gambit will be instructive to future candidates: he dropped his own negative ads and turned righteous; he talked about wanting to be President in the "best way," not the worst; he congratulated himself for "inspiring a new generation" of voters. His signal message became his own rectitude. And he was clobbered. In perhaps the most telling interview of the South Carolina primary, Walter Shapiro, of *USA Today*, spoke with Roy Park, an idealistic Korean-American editorial-page editor of a high-school newspaper. Park said that he was supporting Bush. When he was asked why, he unwittingly echoed the text of a Bush negative ad: the McCain campaign "was crawling with lobbyists."



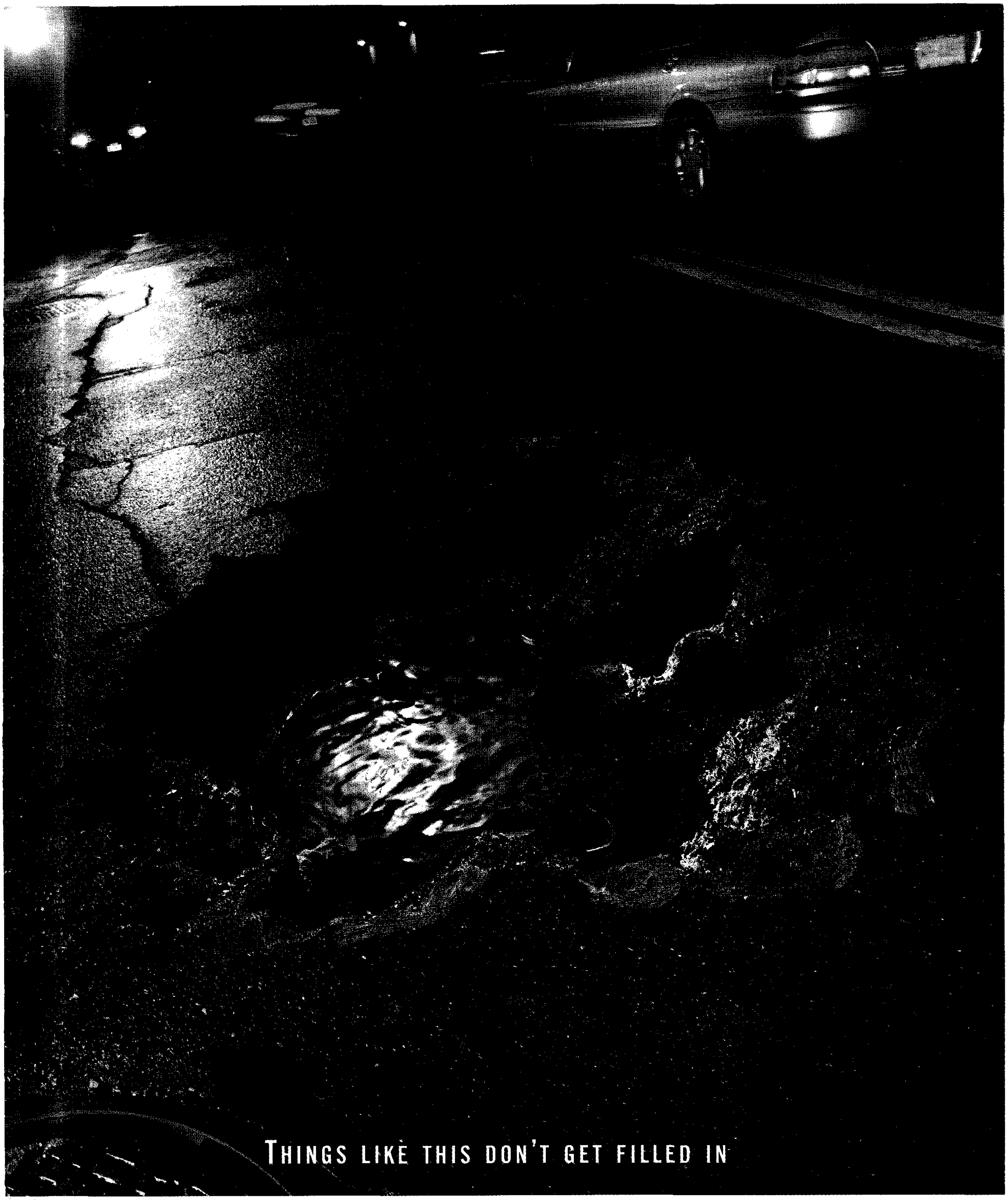
George W. Bush

McCain's next move was also instructive: a modified Eddie Haskell. He continued to avoid negative television and radio ads—he still wanted to be President in the "best" way—but he signalled, in a fighting concession speech after the South Carolina loss, that he was not going to let Bush get away with unanswered assaults. The press—which itself is an institution of Haskellian faux rectitude—was terribly offended by the new tone. Wolf Blitzer told McCain, "A lot of the commentators are already saying that your concession speech last night was . . . mean-spirited." Morton Kondracke called it "bitter" and "harsh." George Will warned, "You dare not come across as a petulant loser." McCain was undaunted. He spent the next few days in Michigan in a lather of creative distemper, lashing out at the Republican establishment and at the Bush supporters at Bob Jones University in South Carolina ("a bunch of idiots") and at the tobacco-industry lobbyists running ads against him ("C'mon down, you jerks"). Travelling on his bus between Saginaw and Ypsilanti on the day before his Michigan triumph, McCain scarfed down doughnuts and ruminated on the nature of the attacks against him: "It reminds me of the old bumper sticker—'The Christian Right Is Neither.' "

There has been and there will continue to be all sorts of ponderous huffing and puffing about the terrible negative turn the Presidential campaign has taken this year. The editorial pages crackle with indignation. Grizzled political observers shake their heads knowingly and lament, "Going negative works." But there is another not-so-horrific truth begging to be exposed: the contentious campaigning has also made this election more fun and more compelling and more informative than it had any right to be. "The truth is, it's revitalizing politics," Anne Wexler, a veteran Democratic Party strategist, says. "People are interested. They're voting in record numbers. Who needs the bland vanilla stuff?"

There are caveats, of course. The personal ugliness directed by Bush supporters against McCain's family is clearly over the line. And the Eddie Haskell gambit—indeed, bloated righteousness of any sort—gets old quickly. But the recent, nasty debate between Al Gore and Bill Bradley at the Apollo Theatre was not just fabulously entertaining; it also reignited—however briefly—interest in a flagging Democratic race. Indeed, most of the "attacks" in this campaign have not only been well within traditional bounds but they have also been *valuable* in unexpected ways. Bradley's inability to respond to Gore's attacks, for example, revealed a lugubrious, un-Presidential weakness in the candidate. McCain's successful Michigan response to Bush's attacks revealed the opposite, but also exposed one of his own weaknesses: a flashy, impractical, self-congratulatory heroism. And Al Gore? Well, it's *so* good to see you again, Mrs. Cleaver!

—*Joe Klein*



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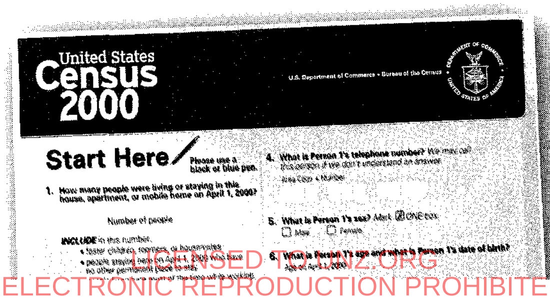
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Start Here Please use a black or blue pen.

1. How many people were living or staying in this house, apartment, or mobile home on April 1, 2000?

Number of people

INCLUDE in this number:
- foster children, roomers, or housemates
- people staying here on April 1, 2000 who have no other permanent place to stay

4. What is Person 1's telephone number? We may call this person if we don't understand an answer.

Area Code + Number

5. What is Person 1's sex? Mark ☒ ONE box.

☐ Male ☐ Female

6. What is Person 1's age and what is Person 1's date of birth?

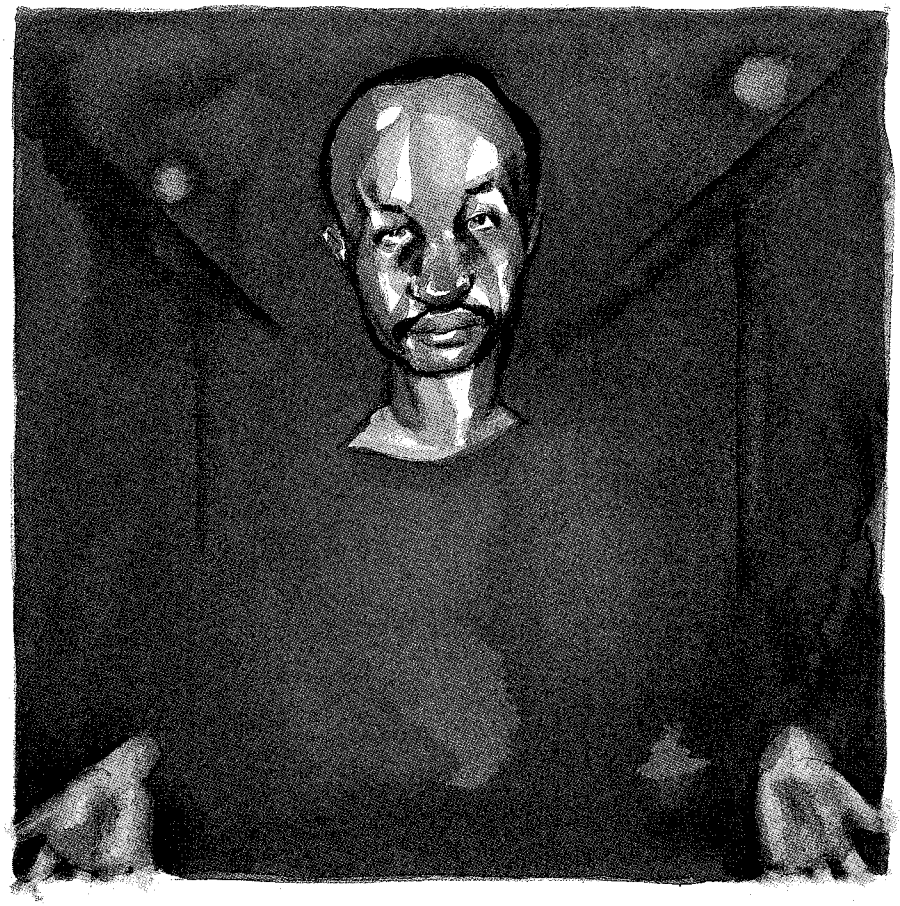
Age on April 1, 2000

ANNALS OF LAW

THE UNASKED QUESTION

Why the Diallo case missed the point.

BY JEFFREY TOOBIN



Amadou Diallo, who died a year ago. What do white cops really see in black faces?

In an era of trials as a form of public entertainment, the Amadou Diallo case, in which four New York City police officers were charged with murdering an unarmed West African immigrant in the vestibule of a Bronx apartment building, was almost perfect—brief, eventful, and full of dramatic star turns. But, at a time when trials are often freighted with great political significance, the case, which resulted in acquittal for all the defendants, served mainly to demonstrate the limits of the criminal-justice system. The failure was most glaring on the subject of race, which was the ever-present subtext of everything about the case—"the elephant in the middle of the courtroom that no one wants to talk about," as one participant in the proceedings put it.

The killing, on February 4, 1999, quickly took its place as a major symbolic event in the history of the city, primarily as a sombre counterpoint to the sharp drop in crime that has occurred during the mayoralty of Rudolph W. Giuliani. It took place during a routine "stop-and-frisk," in law-enforcement argot; the cops said they thought Diallo had been reaching for a gun, and fired forty-one bullets at him at close range. The number of shots became a paradigm of police excess. But, as so often occurs in courtrooms, and rightly so, the trial dealt mainly with the gritty specifics—lighting conditions, bullet trajectories, autopsy reports—that make up the macabre choreography of a judicially scrutinized death. Still, the case did offer a few hints about the agonizing question at its core: what do white cops really see in black faces?

A winter train trip from Manhattan to Albany provides one of the great anticlimaxes in American travel—a hundred and sixty miles up the magnificent, ice-clogged Hudson River to a dreary state capital that combines the charm of Brasília with the panache of Bayonne. This quintessentially New York City event took place here because, in December of last year, an appeals court ruled that pre-trial publicity had denied the defendants a chance at a fair trial in the Bronx. From the start, the locale gave the trial a strange sense of dislocation, like a family fight in front of the neighbors. People did try to adapt, though. Early in the trial, a defense lawyer, James Culleton—whose gravity-defying swirl of gray hair gave him away as an outer-borough guy—instructed one nervous witness, "I know you're from the city, but try to slow down."

The grimly efficient Judge Joseph Teresi presided, in a splendid old chamber with a cut-glass chandelier—but the trial had a second august presence as well. The Reverend Al Sharpton had a semi-official perch in the second row of benches, right behind Diallo's African-robed parents, and no one on either side could miss his comings and goings. Sharpton seemed so homesick that he'd sometimes lean back and engage in sotto-voce debates about the evidence with his longtime antagonist Steve Dunleavy, the Australian-born right-wing columnist for the *Post*. One sensed that Sharpton enjoyed a familiar face—any face. During one break, he smiled and growled at Dunleavy, "After this, you and me are going on a peace walk, no matter what the verdict is." Sharpton seemed to be reaching a new order of eminence. One Sunday night, I ran into him on the train to Albany after he'd held a much-publicized sit-down with Al Gore earlier in the afternoon. On the night before summations, Sharpton served as the first questioner at the debate between Gore and Bill Bradley, at the Apollo Theatre. He left home at five the next morning in order to make it to court on time.

Sharpton dominated this case from the beginning. In the first several weeks after Diallo's death, the Rev, as everyone

STEVE BRODNER

calls him, organized daily protests outside Police Headquarters, where sometimes more than a hundred people—including such notables as Representative Charles B. Rangel, of Harlem, State Comptroller H. Carl McCall, and former Mayor David N. Dinkins—were placed under arrest each day. Seven weeks after Diallo's death, as the protests continued, Robert Johnson, the Bronx district attorney, obtained an indictment charging the four officers with reckless endangerment and second-degree murder, which is punishable by a minimum of fifteen years in state prison and a maximum of life.

The charges reflected the incendiary spirit of the moment; the district attorney could not have obtained a harsher indictment. (Under New York law, first-degree murder applies only to the killing of law-enforcement officials and a few other heinous crimes.) There were two counts of second-degree murder for each defendant—one of homicide "with intent to cause" death and another of murder "with a depraved indifference to human life." In laymen's terms, homicide "with intent" means murder done deliberately, and the typical example of a "depraved indifference" murderer is the gunman who sprays Times Square with machine-gun fire. In announcing the indictment, Johnson said, "I recognize, as others do, that the death of Amadou Diallo has a context larger than the facts of this case."

Sharpton's protests established the context. Eighteen months before Diallo's death, a police officer named Justin Volpe had sodomized a Haitian immigrant named Abner Louima with a broken broomstick in a Brooklyn station house. (Volpe and another officer were later convicted of federal charges in connection with the incident.) But, beyond this highly publicized case, the Diallo shooting capped years of tension between white cops and black New Yorkers. "We weren't just protesting Diallo," Sharpton told me recently. "If it had been just Diallo, I would have been protesting at the Bronx courthouse. I put it on at One Police Plaza because of what goes on every day."

Celebrated trials are usually identified with the names of their defendants, but this one was always called Diallo. The defendants in the case—Sean Carroll, Edward McMellon, Kenneth Boss,

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and Richard Murphy—remained unprepossessingly opaque in the public mind until, and even to an extent after, they took the witness stand. Though many defendants play active roles in the courtroom, the four officers mostly sat in silence, rarely so much as whispering to their lawyers. During breaks, even as they accepted the good wishes of their families and of a rotating cast of fellow police officers, they generally kept their heads down. They embodied their defense: average, anonymous cops.

It was the prosecution's task to convince the jury that these inconspicuous men were something extraordinary: murderers. In this effort, the prosecution got off to a slow start. The lead prosecutor, Assistant District Attorney Eric Warner, sat through most of the trial with a more-in-sorrow-than-in-anger half smile on his face, and his opening statement reflected his rather mournful appearance. He spoke for a perfunctory ten minutes, and summarized the tragic banalities of the case. The four plainclothes officers were patrolling together in an unmarked car on that February night, and Carroll's attention was drawn to Diallo, who was standing in the doorway of a small apartment building on Wheeler Avenue. Carroll and McMellon approached by the outside steps. Without a word of warning, according to Warner—a point disputed by the defense—these two officers aimed their weapons at the defenseless man and emptied their sixteen-bullet clips. Then, after an inculpating "pause," Boss and Murphy, trailing behind, added five and four more shots, respectively.

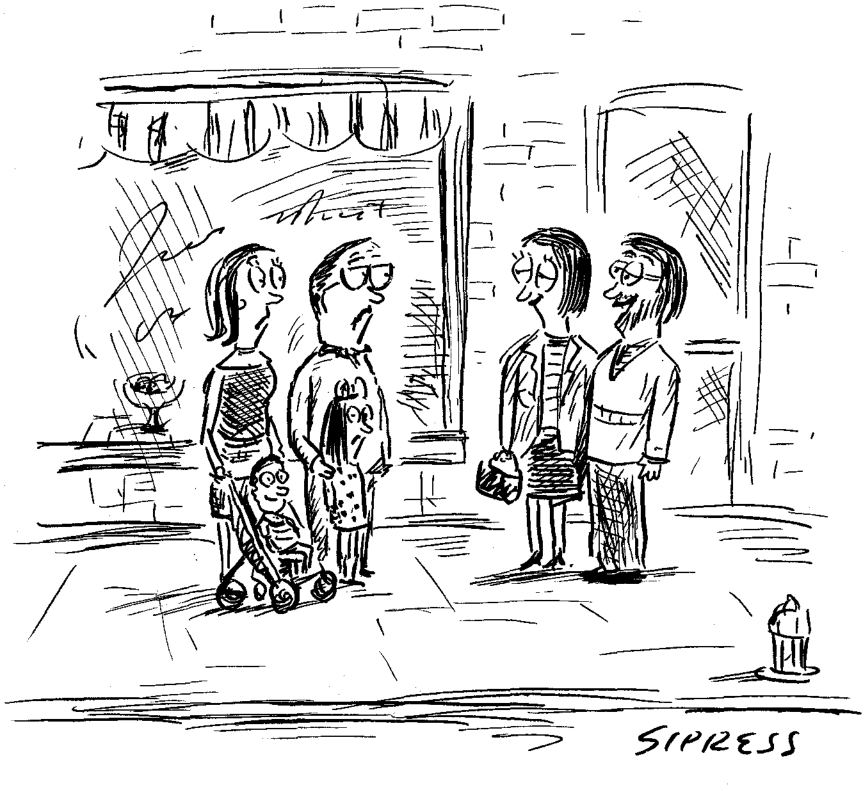
About a crucial issue in the case—why would the four officers do such a thing?—Warner had nothing to offer the jury. "We do not believe that these four defendants woke up that morning, or came on duty that night, with the intent to kill Amadou Diallo or anybody else," he said. Instead, he asserted, the prosecution would simply prove that "they made the conscious decision to shoot a man standing in the confined space of a vestibule."

The prosecutors' initial unsteadiness came through in the classic manner of lawyers with a weak hand to play: they overstated their evidence. The government's case took only four days, and it included no eyewitnesses. There were, however, a handful of residents of Wheeler Avenue who testified about what they saw in the moments before Diallo's death. Through these witnesses, Warner sought to prove that the lighting conditions in the vestibule were good and the neighborhood safe, and that the officers therefore had little reason for worry as they approached Diallo. To establish the amount of light, the government introduced several photographs that had been taken with flashes, making it seem that Wheeler Avenue was paved with gold. (Later, the defense called Diallo's landlord, Deenauth Bassit, to show that the scene had been illuminated by, at most, two forty-watt bulbs encased in filthy globes.)

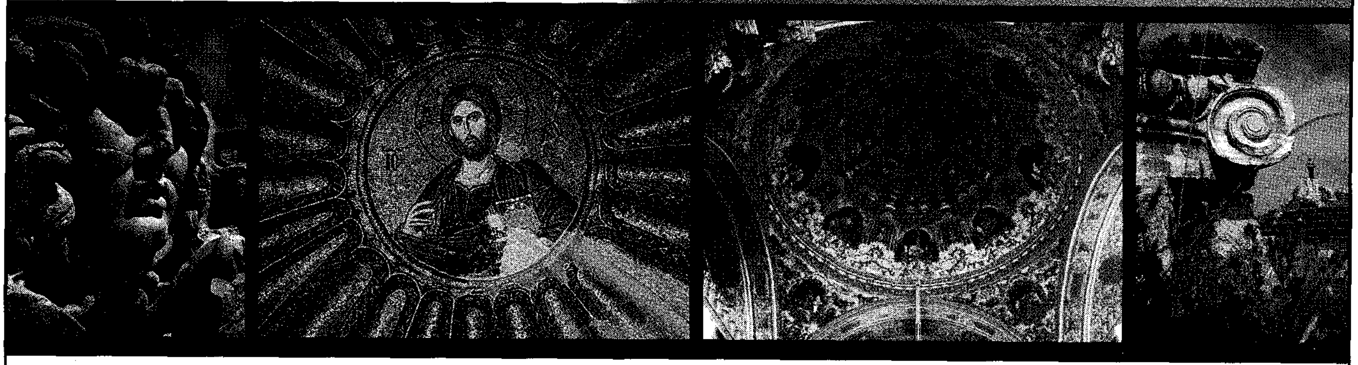
Warner's picture of the Bronx as a kind of urban Mayberry also proved a hard sell. In fact, the Forty-third Precinct, where Diallo lived, ranks among the city's highest crime areas. One aspect of neighborhood life came through, largely by accident, during the testimony of Thomas Bell, a recruit at New York's police academy, who happened to live on the block and had been walking home shortly before the shooting occurred. On cross-examination, the defense sought to bring out the fact that Bell had seen Diallo and crossed the street to avoid this suspicious character. On redirect, the prosecutor tried to show that Bell had another reason for crossing the street. "I don't like to go by that corner," Bell explained. "There's a lot of garbage and rats there, and I avoid it." Notwithstanding the government's gloss, then, the prosecutors wound up proving one of the central contentions of the defense: that these cops had been patrolling a dark, dirty, and dangerous street.

The abbreviated prosecution case largely came down to a single fact: the forty-one shots. By the prosecutor's accounting, the sheer number of bullets established the recklessness—indeed, the murderousness—of the four officers' behavior. The prosecution's final witness, Dr. Joseph Cohen, who performed the autopsy, added the chilling fillip that at least one of the shots, and perhaps three of them, had hit Diallo when he was already down. Yet even the notorious number of shots actually proved rather little in this case. Cops are taught to keep shooting until a threat is removed.

In cases like this one, the law does not



"We found we really missed going to the theatre and eating in nice restaurants, so we gave our kids away."



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require the prosecution to prove motive. But, as the government's case ended, the question that remained in the air, unanswered, was the one that Warner had refused to acknowledge in his opening statement: why would these officers shoot this man?

Trials address crimes, not culture, and the difference between a political protest and a legal proceeding is a necessary one. It is one thing to say that an entire police force has grown arrogant and brutal; it is another to establish that these four officers acted unreasonably under the circumstances. General impressions—even statistical norms—have no place in a criminal case. In a criminal case, all that matters is the actions and attitudes that can be attributed to the specific defendants on trial.

Yet those legal rules obscured the real meaning of this case. The four defendants belonged to the then plainclothes Street Crimes Unit, which has played a major role in the Giuliani administration's assault on crime. The S.C.U.'s "mission," Police Commissioner Howard Safir once testified before the City Council, is to "effect the arrests of violent street criminals, with a particular emphasis on recovering illegal firearms." Or, as Officer Boss put it in his testimony during the trial, the unit's purpose was "to prevent 911 jobs." Even within the N.Y.P.D., the S.C.U. was renowned for its swaggering style. Its slogan was "We own the night."

The Street Crimes Unit had existed within the police department for many years, but it was expanded dramatically during the Giuliani years. First under Police Commissioner William Bratton and then under Safir, the N.Y.P.D. adopted the fashionable "broken windows" theory of policing—that by cracking down on relatively minor offenses, like turnstile-jumping, the city sends the message that law-breaking of any kind will not be tolerated. "Broken windows" requires police officers to take aggressive steps against actual, and potential, criminals, and no cops were more aggressive than the cops in the S.C.U. Safir, in particular, admired the S.C.U.'s style, and he more than doubled its size in 1997, from a hundred and thirty-eight officers to nearly four hundred.

The growth of the S.C.U. was a matter of controversy within the N.Y.P.D., and some senior officers felt that standards and training slipped as the number of these plainclothes officers grew. (All four of the Diallo defendants joined the unit during its Safir-era expansion, and the four had never worked together until the night of Diallo's death.) The S.C.U.'s statistics hinted at the reason for the concern. As befit the growing size of the unit, its officers stopped and frisked ever more New Yorkers: 18,023 in 1997 and 27,061 in 1998. But the unit made 4,899 arrests in 1997 and only 4,647 in 1998. In other words, more cops mostly meant more mistakes—stopping more individuals who had done nothing wrong.

Until the confrontation with Diallo, the night of his death was actually a fairly typical one for an S.C.U. team. They set out from their headquarters, on Randall's Island, at about 10 P.M. and began patrolling the Soundview section of the Bronx. Steering their unmarked car through the Bronx River Houses project, they noticed, according to Officer Carroll, a young man "lurking" near one of the lobbies. They "exited the vehicle," checked the man out, and sent him on his way. A little later, Carroll continued, "I observed an individual who . . . looked like a violent homicide suspect." This man also turned out not to be the person the officers were looking for, and, according to Carroll, "We shook his hand, apologized for the inconvenience, and myself and my partners got back in our car." The officers had made two stop-and-frisks and no arrests.

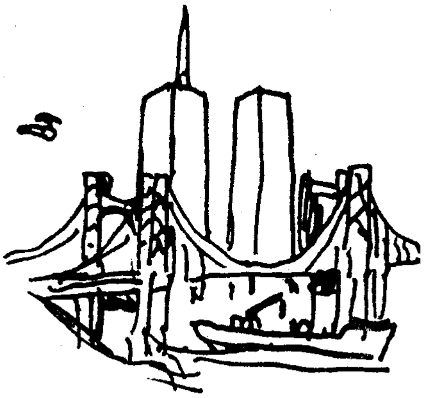
When the officers approached Diallo, they never got close enough to frisk him. One measure of confusion in the trial concerned the issue of why Diallo drew the officers' attention. Carroll, who was riding in the front passenger seat, noticed him first. Later, he testified that they thought Diallo resembled a rape suspect who had operated in the area. (This was unlikely, because, as the prosecutor pointed out during Carroll's cross-examination, Diallo scarcely resembled the suspect, the last rape had occurred almost a year earlier, and in all that time Carroll had never stopped anyone else in connection with the rapes.) Rather, it seems, there was something about Diallo in particular that attracted the officers' attention.

"He was standing on the stoop," Carroll testified. "It appeared he was looking up and down the block. . . . He steps back into the vestibule, like he doesn't want to be seen." According to Carroll, Diallo was "slinking" around, and "peering" out at the street. In light of this suspicious behavior, Carroll announced to his partners, "I got something on the right. We gotta check it out."

Carroll's testimony raised one of the key larger questions of the trial: on what basis can a police officer legally stop a suspect—and how do those rules operate in the real world? In a recent book, "No Equal Justice," David Cole, a professor at the Georgetown University Law Center, surveyed the reasons that courts have found acceptable for stopping suspects at airports, where the standards are similar to those governing stops on the street. According to Cole, the permissible reasons included: arrived late at night; arrived early in the morning; arrived in the afternoon; travelled alone; travelled with a companion; acted too nervous; acted too calm; and so on. As Cole concluded, the standards amount to a "scattershot hodgepodge of traits and characteristics so expansive that it potentially justifies stopping anybody and everybody."

Carroll's vague justification for the stop—with its use of loaded but largely meaningless words like "slinking" and "peering"—thus served as a legal but all too typical pretext for a nighttime stop-and-frisk. Had events proceeded normally, Diallo would simply have been the third innocent young black or Hispanic man that the officers had stopped on this shift. The quartet's oh-for-three evening was not so different from the S.C.U.'s over-all batting average.

But the stop, of course, raised an even more provocative question: what part did Diallo's race play in the officers' decision to approach him? Under the rules of evidence, the prosecutors didn't have the right even to suggest to the jury that the officers may have had a racial motive. None of the four officers said or did anything that night—or, as far as is known, ever—that might suggest a special antipathy toward blacks. Indeed, as the men repeatedly attempted to demonstrate during the trial, they were just four average cops.



But that, in a way, was the problem. A statistical examination of the N.Y.P.D.'s stop-and-frisk policies, conducted by the staff of New York State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer in the aftermath of Diallo's death, found that blacks were more than twice as likely to be stopped on the street for violent crimes. Even adjusting for the higher crime rates of minority neighborhoods, Spitzer's investigators found that, for each arrest made, the New York police stopped many more blacks than whites. (This investigation drew on a hundred and seventy-five thousand descriptions of these stops by the officers themselves, and accepted all their rationales as true; because at least some of the officers undoubtedly fudged their reports, the real disparity between the treatment of black suspects and that of white suspects was almost certainly greater than Spitzer's numbers suggested.)

If Officer Carroll's rationale for the stop was dubious—and it was certainly within the norm of a dubious practice—his subsequent testimony made an awful kind of sense. Carroll, testifying the day before his thirty-seventh birthday, was the oldest of the four defendants by almost a decade, and with his rimless glasses and starched white shirt he looked more like an unusually buff assistant professor than like a night-prowling street cop. (By contrast, the other three defendants looked more like high-school students whose mothers had made them put on ties for the yearbook picture.)

The key moments of Carroll's dramatic day of testimony became familiar images on local, and even national, television. He said that he and Officer McMellon approached Diallo, identified themselves as police, and quietly asked to speak with him. But Diallo failed to respond and turned away, placing one hand on the doorknob and the

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other in his pocket. Carroll saw what he believed was the "slide"—the back handle—of a small black 9-mm. handgun. He shouted "Gun!" to his teammates—a passerby heard this—and then fired his own weapon.

The next seconds were chaotic. As Carroll started firing, McMellon, just behind him, tripped near the top of the steps and fell back. Carroll believed McMellon had been shot; so did Boss and Murphy, who then began to fire. Carroll testified that he kept firing at Diallo because Diallo remained standing, with the black object still in his hand. Diallo stayed up for so long, Carroll testified, that he thought he must be wearing a bulletproof vest. "I started shooting at his legs," Carroll explained. "I figured that was the only way to stop him." He was trying, he said, to "defend my fallen brother." (The period just after McMellon fell was probably the much-discussed pause in the shootings. Several witnesses rapped their knuckles on the witness stand to replicate the duration of the gunfire. By their recounting, it seemed that the pause lasted no more than a second in a shootout that took about five seconds altogether.)

When the firing stopped, Carroll ran to where Diallo lay and found only a wallet in his hand. "Where's the fucking gun?" he shouted. "Where's the fucking gun?" The officers realized the magnitude of their errors almost immediately: Diallo was unarmed; McMellon had not been shot; and they had killed an innocent man. One of the cops frantically shouted into a police radio, "Gimme a bus and a boss!"—an ambulance and a supervisor. Carroll, weeping on the stand, described how he heard Diallo's breathing go still: "I said, 'Oh, God.' I just held his hand and rubbed his face and said, 'Please don't die.' "

When Judge Teresi instructed the jury, of eight whites and four blacks, he provided a bewildering array of choices that required three hours to detail. The charges ranged from the two theories of second-degree murder to such lesser charges as first- and second-degree manslaughter, criminally negligent homicide, and first-degree reckless endangerment. Teresi drew on the usual vocabulary of the courtroom—such words as "wrongfully," "willfully," and "knowingly"—and hoped, as all judges hope, that the jurors would be able to untangle the legalese.

The Judge never addressed the real issue that sent Sharpton's protesters into the streets: the role of race in the cops' decision to shoot Diallo. Warner, the lead prosecutor, had rallied with a rousing summation, but he never quite came out and said that the defendants shot Diallo because he was black. Sharpton supported the prosecution wholeheartedly. "I just can't believe they fired all those shots out of fear," he told me. "After they started shooting, I think they decided they were just going to do this guy." But, for the most part, Sharpton, basking in his newly acquired gravitas, used the platform the case afforded him to push for the kinds of reforms that might prevent an occurrence like this—and untold lesser slights—from happening again. He wants more minority police officers, better training, and a requirement that New York cops live within the city. "Three of four of these guys live outside the five boroughs," he pointed out. "They feel like they are in enemy territory, and we pay the price."

There was no evidence, in this case, of the kind of crude racism that has festered in, say, the Los Angeles Police Department of Mark Fuhrman. There was, instead, a brief, discomforting glimpse of how average cops make snap judgments every day. Sometimes, of course, these calls are just right, and a dangerous weapon is plucked from the street, along with its owner. Sometimes, too, when a cop's gut leads him astray, the only cost is a momentary inconvenience to the young black male who is stopped and frisked. On rare occasions, as in this case, such an error turns to tragedy.

In the final moments of the trial, John Patten, Sean Carroll's bulldog of a defense lawyer, worked himself into a mini-frenzy and told the jury, in frustration, "This case has been whipped up with passions to divide us." Warner coolly objected, noting that the public reaction to the death of Amadou Diallo had not been introduced as evidence in the case and thus could not be commented upon in summation. Teresi sustained, telling the jury, "That's not part of this case." In the narrow gaze of the law, the Judge was right. ♦

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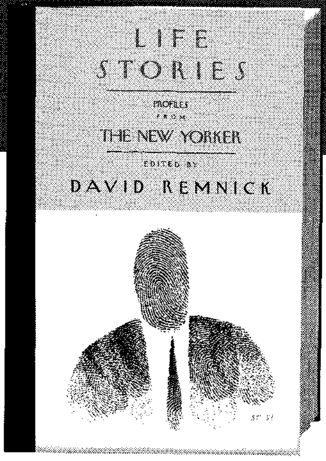

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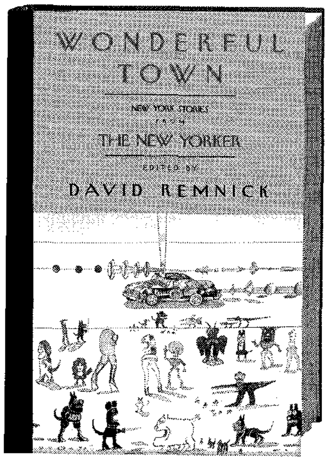

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BY ELLIS WEINER

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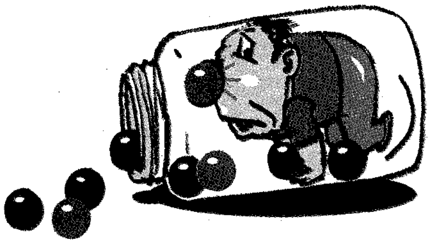

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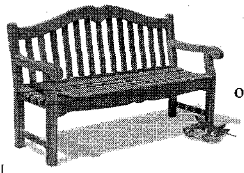

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LETTER FROM TURKEY

THE RUG MISSIONARY

A dealer sets out to give his business a better name.

BY MICHAEL SPECTER

When I first visited the city of Antalya, on the Mediterranean coast of Turkey, four years ago, the streets near the Old Town's twelfth-century minaret were filled with carpet salesmen. They advertised themselves by shouting in German, English, Russian, and Turkish—any language that they thought might work. They hissed at me when I ignored them, and even grabbed my sleeve. One shop, however, caught my eye: the Orient Bazaar, which occupied a large brick house on Pasha Camii Sokak. There was nobody out front trawling for business, but a string of beautiful kilims hung from the walls. When I peered inside, I saw a man reading in the corner. A German shepherd slept heavily on the doorstep—not exactly a welcome mat—but I decided to go in anyway.

Whether you are in Baku, Yerevan, Beirut, or the Grand Bazaar of Istanbul, every visit to a rug shop is a courtship. There is a ritual: the proprietor doesn't ask what you want, and you don't tell him, because etiquette demands evasion, flirtation. Within minutes, apple tea or thick, sweet coffee appears on a small silver tray, usually carried by a young boy. But as I crossed the threshold of this sturdy old house the owner glanced at me without getting up. "I don't bargain," he declared, in a loud voice. "My prices are fixed. If bargains are what you like, please go someplace else."

I had never heard of such a thing. Everyone knows that part of buying a rug is haggling with the dealer. Well, not here. Mehmet Saggun, an engaging, contemplative Turk, turned out to be a sort of merchant philosopher and rug missionary. I later found out that he is also the most successful dealer in Antalya, and that he has clients scattered from Innsbruck to Arizona.

Mehmet, who is forty-three, is a burly man, a former local tennis champion with a row of tarnished trophies that he refers to as "my other collection" arranged on shelves in his home. He keeps four safes filled with rugs in his rambling, seven-room shop, but rarely opens them. "Most people come in and I just let them see what I have on the floor," he told me. "If I think somebody is serious, I open a safe. If they are serious and rich, maybe I open two. And, if they are serious, rich, and I like them, I show them everything I have."

Perhaps sensing an eagerness that far exceeded my resources, Mehmet spent hours with me that day, going through his entire collection. His prices ranged from less than a thousand dollars to more than a hundred thousand. Just before I left, he unfurled his most glorious possession: the fragments of a four-hundred-year-old rug from Kütahya, a celebrated carpet city in western Turkey. It was a threadbare rag, like something you might use to clean a bicycle chain. As I stared at it, Mehmet laughed and told me that a love of rug fragments was an acquired taste. He suggested that I return someday and accompany him on one of his frequent journeys through Turkey, getting to know carpets by seeing and feeling hundreds of them. "Unfortunately, there are no shortcuts," he said. "It's a wonderful field, filled with unappreciated art and many fascinating people. But it is also a world with more than its share of frauds and liars and people you don't want to know. If you really want to learn about rugs, you are going to need to work at it. And you are going to need a guide."

When I decided to accept Mehmet's offer to travel with him, I asked a well-known American collector, Gerard Paquin, whom I should consult to get a feel for the business and the art. He sent me, by E-mail, this reply:

> The mind boggles. Who should I suggest? The secretive London doctor who built the world's best collection of Turkmen rugs? The Assassin, who lives in motel rooms between

> East and West Coasts and loves to make the big score? Dynamo Denny, the Islamic-art-history professor and one of the only serious Islamic-art historians who will go near the rug world? The mother goddess nuts? The collector from California who published his collection and detailed the sexual nature of every design? Enough.

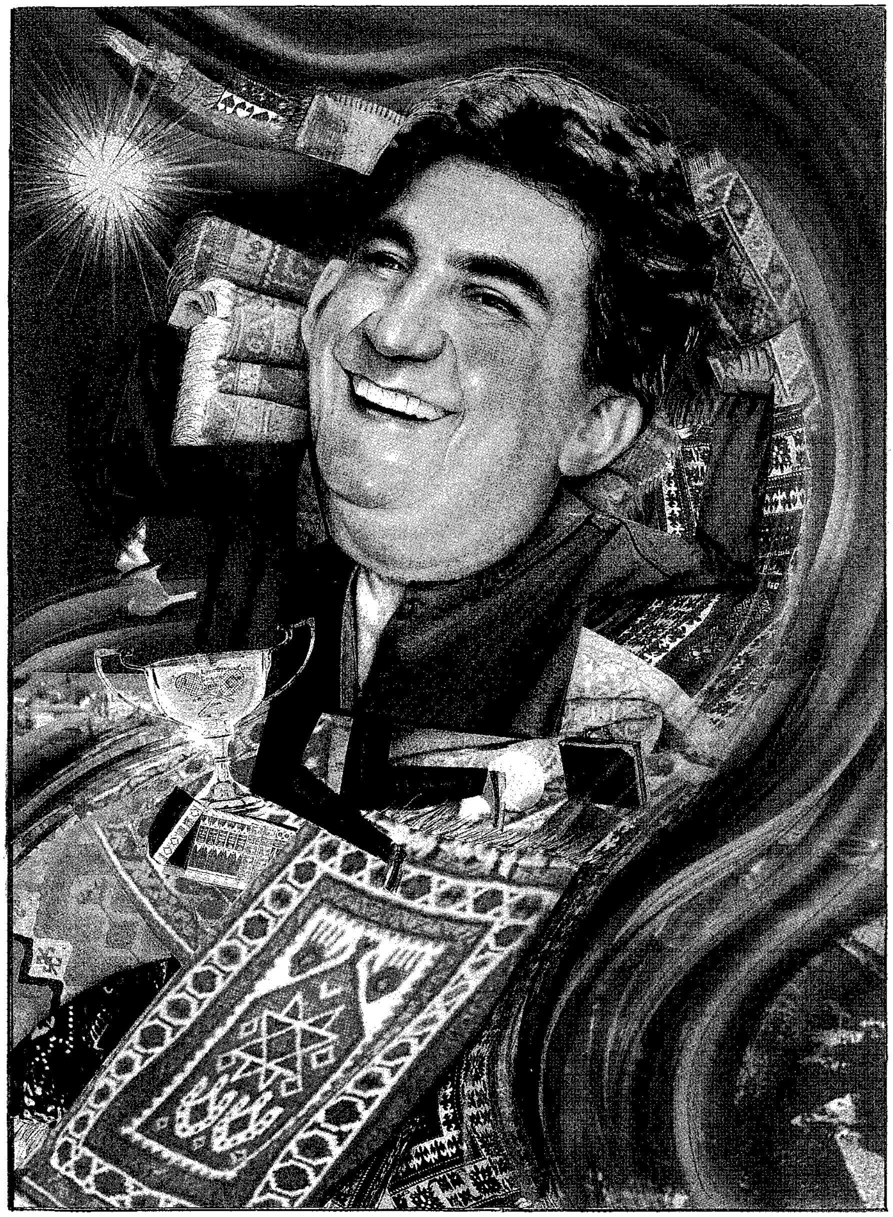
To my relief, he added:

> You indicated that you were going to Antalya. If it is not Mehmet Saggun you are going to see, be sure you do. He has wonderful, wonderful kilims.

It was serendipity that had drawn me to Mehmet, but as I called around I began to realize that I had stumbled on a textiles savant. “Mehmet is the only man to see in Antalya,” the rug expert Franz Sailer told me when I phoned him at his gallery, in Salzburg. The German archeologist Bernard Andreae agreed. “My father had carpets. I have always been around them. But Mehmet made me see them,” Andreae said. “It would be foolish to look at him as somebody who just sells carpets. He is really the caretaker of a culture.”

There are thousands of rug merchants in Turkey; no town of any size is without them. A few deal only in the rarest carpets and flat-woven kilims; they can sell a hundred rugs a year and live comfortably. Most, however, make their living by supplying tourists with what Mehmet contemptuously calls “wallpaper for floors”—large, mass-produced carpets of thick pile, made from poor-quality wool, and with garish colors created by chemical dyes. Mehmet says such rugs repel him. But in Antalya, which is four hundred and thirty-five miles south of Istanbul, you can’t make a living solely on the highest tier. So Mehmet, who specializes in Turkish kilims, deals in Caucasian and tribal rugs as well, selling as many as two thousand pieces a year, most for a few hundred dollars each. “I’m a dealer,” he told me with a shrug. “I try to make a ten-per-cent profit. But you can’t plan it. You have to be smart and you have to be lucky. But mostly you just have to have rugs.”

The past few years have been an exceptionally busy time in the textile world. Prosperity in the West has increased demand for all sorts of art, and that includes rugs. The editors of the London-based magazine *Hali*, whose audience consists of the most passionate people in the rug world, occasionally find themselves publishing ads that cost more than the carpet in the picture. The Internet, which is full of auctions as well as the most arcane conversations about textiles, has also played a role. One Web site, rugnotes.com, received about three hundred and fifty visitors a day three years ago; now it averages more than thirty thousand. But it is never easy knowing whom to trust in this world. “First, you have to see if somebody will identify himself as a rug person,” Paquin told me. “Because this is not always viewed as a savory profession.”



JANET WOOLLEY

“I started treating my pieces like guests in a fine hotel,” Mehmet Saggun says. “Some stay with me only a few nights, others for weeks or more.”

It is hard to spend any time with serious dealers and not hear them speak unhappily about their image. In France, to call someone a *marchand de tapis* is no compliment. Nor do the words “rug merchant” have warm associations in many other languages. More than one person recalled for me the line used by Robert McFarlane, Ronald Reagan’s national-security adviser, when his 1986 mission to swap guns for hostages in Iran ended in failure. Of his dealings with the Iranians, he wired back to the White House, “At bottom they really are rug merchants,” and said they were no better than bookies, grad students, and Tatars.

“I meet somebody and I am already thinking of ways not to tell them what I do,” Mehmet told me when I returned to Antalya. “The best they will say is that maybe I am a good dealer, like a tame specimen of a wild beast.”

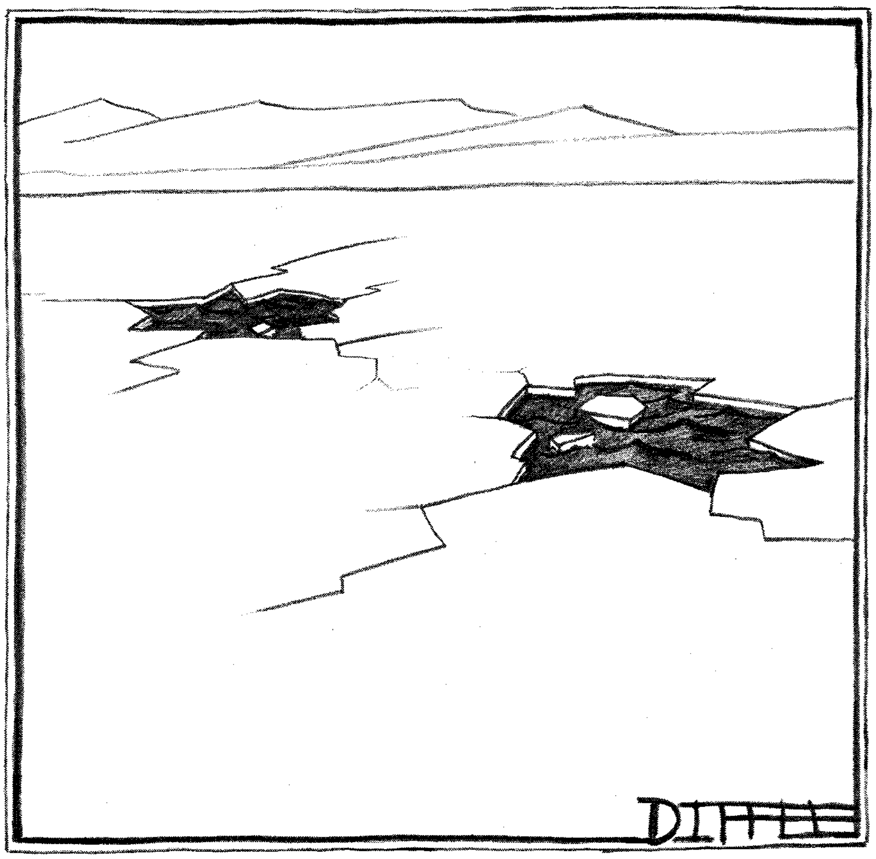
He recalled a night he spent a few years ago on a cruise ship before it left Antalya for Greece. One of his best customers had faxed him, suggesting that he bring his finer kilims to show the passengers. Mehmet hurried over, but that night an American woman lost a valuable ring. “They called the police and they assumed it had to be me—I could see it in their eyes,” he said. “I still wonder what would have happened if the woman hadn’t found the ring in her suitcase.”

Such distrust can be disabling. “Tourists expect to be cheated,” Mehmet said as we sat in a café near his store one evening. “Everything follows from that. One day, a man from Berlin was standing in front of my shop. He said to his wife, ‘Watch how easy it is to take one of these carpet dealers. They are ignorant.’ He spoke in German. It never occurred to him I understood every word. I said, in Turkish, ‘Come in.’ We spoke in Turkish, in bad English, and in a few words of German.

“He knew a lot about rugs,” Mehmet continued, “and he saw a beautiful antique. I told him it was only a thousand dollars but I had promised it to a friend who was travelling. ‘If he doesn’t want it you can have it,’ I told him. He looked at his wife and told her that I was an idiot—that the rug was worth ten thousand dollars at least. He was in my shop maybe thirty times in the next few days, always asking, ‘Did he call? Did he call? Did he call?’ Finally, about the fourth morning, he asked again. And I said, ‘My friend, today we speak in German.’ He was astonished. ‘Remember how you were going to make me small, that all dealers were fools? Well, I am a fool who speaks your language. That piece you wanted is beautiful, I congratulate you on your eyes. But there is no travelling friend. It is for sale. And for a reasonable price. Only not to you. Never to you. A piece like that deserves better than such arrogant German pricks.’ His wife couldn’t help it. She smiled.”

Although Mehmet was born in the mountains not far from Antalya, he speaks German better than he speaks Turkish. Mehmet fell into his profession in the early eighties, after leaving Stuttgart, where he’d lived for thirteen years, and moving back to a homeland he never knew. His father had taken the family to Germany when he was nine, and Mehmet had watched him struggle to fit in to a society that didn’t really want him. “At the time, I was reading many heavy German books, philosophy, literature. It was a depressing period in my life. And I lived in one room with a big, empty white wall.

“I kept looking at that wall and it made me nervous,” he went on. “It was so big and so white. I had to cover it with something, so I got a kilim. When I looked at it, something just happened to me. When I was a child, I collected stamps. From an early age, I always had the feeling for a unique piece. This was like that all over again. Some people always remember fine meals or wines, or they can quote long parts of their favorite books or tell you if a piece of music is played too fast or too slow. I remember rugs. If I smell one time the dirt of a fine carpet, it is in my nose forever. “



Sumo on Ice

When I got back to Antalya on a Saturday night, Mehmet was waiting at my hotel. From there we walked over to his shop. It’s an open, airy building, with immense walls, which are perfect for displaying his latest acquisitions. Like many dealers, Mehmet once found it hard to part with his best pieces. “It almost ruined me,” he said. “It was a catastrophe. Until a friend gave me some advice: be either a dealer or a collector; but you can’t be both.

“At that point, I started treating my pieces like guests in a fine hotel,” he said. “Some stay with me only a few nights, others for weeks or more. But eventually every rug I buy has got to go.” There is one exception: the first unusual carpet he ever bought, a prayer rug from the nearby mountains, which he keeps as a talisman. “It’s a Haghia Sophia,” he said—a Turkish pile rug made in the late eighteen-hundreds. He unfolded it so that I could see the likeness of Justinian’s towering dome translated into wool. “Not the most beautiful rug I have ever owned, but it is in perfect shape, and you will never see another like it. I bought it in 1981, for fifteen hundred dollars, and this I will never sell.”

Mehmet follows the rug market closely, paying attention to prices at auctions around the world. He says that most customers, no matter how experienced, are insecure enough to want somebody to tell them their rugs are worth what they plan to pay. He is always happy to oblige. "I have an eighteenth-century Mudjur prayer rug in great condition," he said, and unrolled the rug for me. It had deep blues, soft browns, and a muted red rarely seen these days. The wool felt like cashmere. Birds hovered at the border, and a rich, bold tree of life crawled up the center of the pile. "I have seen only one other this good in eighteen years. It cost me about four thousand dollars, and I am going to sell it for six thousand."

Mehmet can be aggressive; he is, after all, a rug merchant. But he is also remarkably relaxed. He succeeds, in part, because his approach is so restrained and seductive. Mehmet not only refuses to bargain, as a matter of principle, but tells every customer that he will always take back anything he sells at the price the customer paid for it—as long as it's in the same condition. That is his signature sales pitch. (In eighteen years, he says, three people have taken him up on the offer.)

One afternoon, we were standing in a sunny dayroom on the second floor of his building, planning our travels: first, a quick trip to the nearby mountains, to visit a tribe of nomads, and then a longer journey, to Konya, a hundred and twenty-five miles to the northeast of Antalya, which is one of the great carpet centers of the world. Mehmet spends a lot of time on the road. He travels to Ankara and Cappadocia at least once a year, and to Konya and Istanbul several times. He stays in cheap hotels, spends his days on overstuffed divans in musty rug shops, and eats when he has the time. Later this month, Mehmet will display kilims in San Francisco, at the American Conference on Oriental Rugs. It is his first trip to the United States; he has not come to America before, partly because his language skills have turned Germany and Austria—where kilims are especially popular—into natural markets, and partly because he knows that there are often better carpets on sale in the rug district of Manhattan than in most Turkish cities, and at better prices. When I visited Mehmet, his inventory was getting low after a successful six-week sales trip through Europe, and it was time to replenish his stock.

Mehmet said he'd show me factories that used traditional looms and dyes—a vital development in a country where poorly made carpets have threatened the industry for well over a century. Nothing has been more damaging than the introduction, around 1860, of synthetic dyes, which can bleed easily, and which gradually pulled villagers away from a tradition they had perfected over centuries.

Making dyes was once a treasured craft, something akin to sorcery, and the recipes were often so complicated and obscure that most tribes chose certain people to do nothing but gather the necessary roots, nuts, leaves, fruits, and insects. It can take three hundred and twenty-five pounds of dead insects or dried herbs to produce just one pound of even the most common color. Here is the nineteenth-century recipe for Birbul's blue, a pale-sky tint, which was first published in the West by Walter A. Hawley, in 1913, in his classic book, "Oriental Rugs Antique & Modern":

> Take cinnabar, indigo and alum, grind and sift lighter than the light dust of the high hills; soak for ten hours; keep stirring it; put in the wool and soak for many hours. Boil for three hours; wash in kurd water, water in which kurds and whey have been well beaten up; leave for three hours, and then wash and beat again in water.

These are the instructions for dark gray, a more difficult color to get right:

> Take the fruit of the *Cupressus sempervirens*, and seeds and seed pods of babul (*Acacia arabica*), iron-filings water, and alum. Steep over night. Now add the water and let it soak for twenty-four hours, then boil for two or three hours, until the color is right, then wash and dry in the sun.

Although Mehmet often says that you can't know a fine rug until you feel the wool, he is primarily a color man. "Mehmet has the visual equivalent of perfect pitch," Bernard Andreae told me. "He is like a man who hears all the notes in a complex orchestral work." Andreae, who was for many years the head of the German Archeological Institute of Rome, and is one of Mehmet's most devoted customers, said, "It is a gift I have only seen a few times in my career."

Mehmet can spot a bogus green, an oxidized black, a cheesy yellow from across a darkened room. He has been known to talk for hours about madder, indigo, and saffron. He told me that he once spent three days deciding not to buy an old Anatolian kilim of potentially great value. "It was a perfect rug," he said. "The wool was right. The design was wonderful. But the blue gave me a bad feeling. So I walked away."

Another time, he was in the shop of an internationally famous Istanbul dealer, on the trail of a special kilim. "I was looking for an antique piece from Bergama for a collector, and I saw it in this shop. It seemed perfect. But every time I touched the piece it said it was a lie. My heart told me not to buy it, but my brain said, 'It's O.K.' It was a beautiful piece, a little repaired. Old, great colors. But I said to myself, 'Don't buy this.' There was something about the red that bothered me. It was absolutely exact, but it didn't belong on *that* rug. I couldn't figure it out. Finally, I told the dealer that I had a bad feeling about the piece. And he said to me, 'We are friends, so I will tell the truth. It is a fake.' "

The making of a tribal rug is similar in many ways to the performance of a jazz standard: the patterns are traditional, but the improvisations—varying colors, spatial relationships between design elements, even the type of wool—can change in any carpet. Although the colors and the placement of every knot in a Persian or an Indian court carpet might be mapped out, planned for months, and executed with precision, Caucasian and Turkish kilims often seem coarsely woven, abstract, and spontaneous. Mehmet hates the floral fussiness of even the most majestic Persian carpets. One day, he suggested that we go to the mountains "to visit the Dosemealti"—nomads who are known for their craftsmanship. "I have made a lot of money from these rugs," he told me. "When I started, in 1982, I went to their villages, and it was like finding gold. I would take dozens of beautiful old pieces home in a week. Now I am lucky if there are five a month." When I asked why the old pieces were so good, he replied with one of his basic rules of the carpet trade: "They were made before tourism. There are no wrong pieces from before tourism."

Mehmet's shop is closed just four days each year, so he can fumigate the building to protect his precious stock from weevils. In the hot weather, when his store and the city are most active, he never gets out of bed much earlier than noon and rarely shows up at work before 6 P.M. As a favor to me, though, we left early, and as we drove toward the snow-capped mountains Mehmet suddenly pulled the car to the side of the road next to a cemetery. One headstone towered above the others.

"That man was the first carpet dealer in Antalya," Mehmet said, pointing to the marker. "When I started, I went to his shop. He said he would help, and he sold me several pieces. I spent most of my money. The next day, an expert told me the rugs were all new, washed in chemicals to make them look antique. I was shocked. I asked many people to go to this dealer, and I arranged to come while they were drinking tea, to see if he was ashamed. He just laughed at me and said, 'Welcome to this business. You have to open your eyes if you want to become a dealer.' I was so angry that I read every book about carpets, and when I found experts I would invite them to eat, to drink. I wouldn't let them go. I worked longer, I learned more. He took me for eight thousand marks"—about three thousand six hundred dollars. "It was a lot of money, but it was well spent."

We started to drift back toward the car. "We did not speak for many years," he continued. "In 1991, I went into a new shop. I saw him there and he said, 'What do you want?' The shop turned out to be his. I told him I saw some nice pieces. He said, 'You will never own one of my rugs.' But not long after that he got drunk and he tried to force a taxi-driver to go the wrong way down a one-way street. The driver said no, so he refused to pay. They struggled. The cab-driver took a knife from his glove compartment and stabbed him through the heart. As soon as he was dead, his younger brother came to me and said he didn't want the rugs. So I bought every one of them."

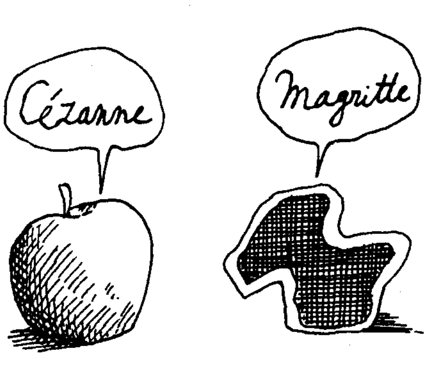
Soon we were driving through the foothills near Dosemealti, and passed a wide marketplace with blue-and-white umbrellas. Dogwood and cherry trees were beginning to bloom. "Wool!" Mehmet shouted, as a huge flock of sheep scampered across rocks above the roadway. "Look at those carpets." Where some might see lamb chops, Mehmet sees rugs. "We have wonderful sheep here," he said, explaining that it is the breed and not the climate which matters most in wool production. "Nice weaving, wonderful colors, great design, and a bad sheep will always make a bad rug."

We passed houses of recent vintage, made from cheap brick, and each had two or three rooms—a kitchen, a living room, and a bedroom. Women sat in hallways, hunched over looms the size of harps; there was a powerful smell of fresh flatbread stuffed with chives, fennel, and peppers. When we arrived at the home of an old friend of Mehmet's, I stood in the street listening to the dull thwack of the hammers that village women use to pack knots tightly in horizontal rows on carpets.

Mehmet walked into the living room, stood in the center of what seemed to me to be a sea of identical carpets, and found what he was looking for within moments. "There is a very nice rug here," he said softly. "The rest are nothing." The rugs had the Dosemealti pattern: a large field filled with camel's hooves, crabs, and stars. Mehmet patiently explained the symbols to me, but he can't bear collectors who cling to technical rug facts as if they were baseball statistics. "You see them," Mehmet said, laughing. "Knot counters." He was referring to people who believe that the number of knots per square inch is all that matters in a rug. "They dive onto the carpet and start counting. They never even step back, take a breath, and try to decide if they love it." He went on, "You know, I've thought about this. People like music because it's just sounds put together in a way that has the power to move us. The same is true with carpets. There is a harmony, when it works, that is really beautiful. The rest is really silly."

The next day, we took off for Konya, and several hours into a drive through the broad plains Mehmet's brand-new, fifteen-hundred-dollar cell phone started to chirp. He answered, speaking briefly, in Turkish. A man with a rug was calling from a Russian border town. He is a picker—the closest thing in the Asian steppes to a travelling salesman—and he wanders through Turkey, Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan looking for antique rugs and kilims to sell to dealers like Mehmet. (The word "antique," though it is used often, is ambiguous. Most experts, including Mehmet, consider anything made before 1900—and sometimes up to the beginning of the First World War—an antique.) "People just roam the country looking for rugs," Mehmet said. "It's foragers, pickers, and ghouls. Many of the mosques have been robbed. If you see something wonderful, you have to wonder why."

Clearly, the man thought he had something special. Mehmet listened for a minute, asked a few questions—about colors, pile, structure, design—and then told him the rug was a type that has been easy to find in the West since the Soviet Union collapsed, in 1991. The fall shook the carpet market profoundly. Across the Caucasus and southern Russia, rare rugs and kilims were suddenly selling for almost nothing. Classic pieces—Kazaks and Sevans, prized nineteenth-century Caucasian rugs known for their rich pile and unusual medallion designs—disappeared for the price of a modest bribe. When I lived in Moscow and often travelled to the Caucasus, I heard frequent tales of trucks backing up late at night to the loading docks of museums in Tbilisi and Baku and carrying off carpets. "If only I was in Baku when the Soviet Union died," Mehmet said dreamily. "With fifty thousand dollars, one weekend, and a truck, I could have become rich forever."



Konya, which has about half a million residents, is one of the world's oldest cities, and it is Turkey's center of Islamic fundamentalism. This is where the thirteenth-century Sufi poet Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi founded the whirling dervishes, and where he wrote the "Spiritual Couplets," which helped shape Islamic thought. Textiles have been woven in Konya at least since the time of the Seljuk dynasty, of the eleventh century. Some of the oldest surviving Islamic carpets, made in the thirteenth or fourteenth century, were found in the Alaadin mosque there, in 1905, after lying undisturbed for hundreds of years.

In Konya, Mehmet intended to drop in on a dozen shops that carry antique Anatolian kilims, and a few factories. He made it clear that on these visits I was to keep quiet. "There are rules," he said. "Never ask me if a piece is good or bad. If you think a rug is nice, and you want it, just say it looks interesting. If I agree with you, I will ask the owner what he wants." The process seemed a little secretive, and I said so. "These are people I have to work with," Mehmet replied. "Don't embarrass me by making me comment on the quality. I can do that, but only when we are alone."

We arrived late in the day and went straight to a factory. I noticed one large carpet based on the flower-and-medallion patterns of rugs made in Ushak, another important carpet city, in western Turkey. I asked the price of this new piece; the owner said nothing but threw it on the floor for me to examine. I walked around, admiring its colors—rose, ochre, aubergine—and thought about buying it for a friend. Before I could stop myself, I turned to Mehmet and asked the forbidden question: "What do you think of this one?"

Mehmet looked as if I had struck him. Torn between honor as a host and duty to his clan, he approached the rug slowly, like a lion sizing up a sleeping wildebeest. Finally, he knelt down and began to rake his fingers violently across the carpet while the factory owner looked on in dismay. Clumps of wool fell away every time Mehmet moved his fist across it. "What do I think?" he said, deliberately, still filled with rage at the predicament I had created for him. "I think this is one of the ugliest rugs in Turkey. It's badly made, the pattern is weak, the dyes are all chemical, and the wool won't last a year. That's what I think." He made brief apologies and walked out of the room. He didn't speak to me until we got back to the hotel. "Tomorrow, we are going to see some friends of mine," he said. "Don't do this again."

The muezzin's wail rolled through the center of town at five-twenty the next morning. I took a walk in the gathering light and braced myself for the coming day—and Mehmet—with three cups of strong Turkish coffee. After the business with the bad rug, I had given Mehmet some time to himself. We were to meet around eleven at a friend's shop, but before we did I went to visit a merchant named Pasha, whose "million-dollar rug" is discussed with much amusement from Antalya to Istanbul. Pasha is famous, not so much for the quality of his rugs but because he will sell them for prices that no reasonable person would pay. Mehmet did not want to comment on what I would see there. "Talking about other people's pieces to somebody like you is like giving away national-security secrets," he told me grumpily. But he said that he wanted me to understand something about rug prices. "Rugs are worth what people will pay," he said. "It is not a rational business. Art never is. It's emotion. There are many dealers who charge a lot because they think it will make them important. And, much too often, it works."

Pasha turned out to be a well-dressed man in his sixties with a blazing smile featuring two gold teeth. He had short gray hair and a trim little mustache. After he ordered coffee, we looked at a dozen antique kilims and several nineteenth-century Caucasian rugs—all costing far more than they should. Soon a man arrived carrying a large key chain. I assumed that the million-dollar rug was in a copper safe next to the desk. Pasha shuffled over and opened it. Instead of a rug he hauled out an even larger key chain and tossed it to the waiting man, who promptly disappeared. Five minutes later, he came back with a black trash bag. The million-dollar rug, which Pasha advertises on his business cards, is from Sivas, a city in north-central Anatolia. Pasha, using a local man to interpret, said that it was a hundred and fifty years old. It was a very small prayer rug but seemed to be in perfect condition, with vines springing from rose-filled vases. Pasha told me that a few years ago he had been offered a new Mercedes filled with five kilos of gold for the rug. "I never considered it," he said, claiming to have purchased the rug for sixty-five thousand German marks—about twenty thousand dollars—in 1985. I asked him if any experts had come to see it. "Experts are fools," he replied. "They know nothing about carpets."

Later, when I showed a photograph of the rug to Danny Shaffer, the editor of *Hali*, he laughed, pointing out that the

"Your metabolism is the envy of everyone at this party."

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business is filled with eccentrics like Pasha. "It's hard to judge from a picture," Shaffer said after looking at it. "But for a million dollars you ought to be able to buy a hundred of these."

Mehmet was waiting for me in a warehouse called Karavan, which must have had five thousand kilims in it. We slipped out through a back door and into an alley. Around the corner, Mustafa Buyukerkek—a pleasant fellow, who told me that he was the son of a local carpet legend named Cassim—had some pieces he wanted us to see. "I have some great things right now," he said as we entered his cold storeroom, which was crammed with kilims, all folded carefully, so that only a few inches of each was visible. Such an arrangement is actually a convenience for a professional like Mehmet, who can walk into a shop, look at five hundred rugs, all of which are turned inside out, and—just from the colors and the weft—pull out two or three "interesting pieces" within minutes.

When Mehmet concentrates on a good carpet, he starts to squint. It's like a poker player's "tell"—the tipoff that proves he's excited. "Show me the good ones," he told Mustafa. "Just the good ones." With the help of an assistant, Mustafa started tossing dozens of rugs on the floor. Mehmet eliminated ninety-five per cent of them instantly. "No," he kept barking in Turkish. "No. No. No." Mustafa threw an old Kazak to the side. It had grays and deep purples that have not been used for years. "This is recut," Mehmet explained. "It's maybe twenty per cent of what was once a grand piece."

Mustafa kept the rugs coming. "Look at this Kurdish piece," Mehmet said. "It's nice, but it's too strong." After an hour, he had selected about two dozen to look at later. Finally, it was time for Mustafa to produce his most valuable piece: a fragment of a green seventeenth-century Konya prayer rug. Green is exceedingly difficult to produce with organic dyes. This one was splendid—rich but not electric. The mihrab (the arch that points toward Mecca during prayer) was outlined in a red made from the roots of madder, whose use has declined in favor of cheaper synthetic dyes. Mehmet's eyes shrank to the size of lasers. "Buying fragments is an illness," he said, with obvious excitement in his voice. "It is also the highest level in our business. For the first ten years, I couldn't understand how people could do it. I literally threw away priceless rugs."

Mustafa found this hard to believe.

"It's true," Mehmet insisted. "When I was starting, I had a friend who was a shepherd. I gave him fifteen hundred dollars and I told him to go to the mountains and buy old kilims. He returned in a truck that was absolutely full of antique pieces—beautiful. He had bought them by the kilo, telling villagers he needed old wool. It was like saying you want to buy the works of the Renaissance masters, but only for the paint. But he told me he needed another four hundred dollars. I couldn't believe it. Half of the pieces—five hundred kilos—were in bad condition, so I sent them all back. Some were centuries old. 'We don't need to spend money on ripped, shredded pieces,' I told him."

He stopped to stare with affection at the fragment on the floor. "I already know who the owner of this will be," he said, in triumph. "I can see it on his wall."

We made our last stop as darkness fell, ending up on a backstreet at a storefront with no name on the door and no carpets in the windows. Mehmet knocked, and we were admitted at once.

"These people make the best fakes I have ever seen," Mehmet told me. "If you would rather wait outside, that would be fine. What they make are technically outstanding kilims. They are rewoven from old wool, and very few people could tell the difference." I promised to keep my mouth shut this time. Blatant forgery is relatively rare in the rug trade. Nevertheless, sophisticated fakes have made their way into nearly every major museum, large collection, and significant auction house. (The most notorious forger, a Romanian named Theodor Tuduc, was the weaving world's Clifford Irving. Tuduc died almost twenty years ago. One of his fakes hung undetected in the Victoria and Albert Museum for years.)

Inside the shop, two men were sitting at a wooden workbench, wearing jewellers' glasses and weaving on what seemed to be miniature looms. They were staring at photographs of carpets taken from an old Sotheby's catalogue. Nobody offered me coffee or tea. Mehmet started to look through a few rugs, stopping at a giant light-blue saff-kilim (which dealers often sell as family prayer rugs) from central Anatolia. He was obviously taken with the workmanship, and it was clear that the wool had been very carefully distressed. "You could pretend this is real and sell it for twenty-five thousand dollars," he said. "I prefer to sell it for three thousand dollars. People should be happy to pay that for something that looks great, is made beautifully, but is not a collector's item."

But will they be happy? I asked. Mehmet seemed distracted, although I could tell that he loved the rug. "Well," he said, "to be honest, no. People would rather be lied to and pay ten times as much. It's an aspect of human psychology. I sometimes think that if I charged five times more for a rug, people would be more eager to buy it. But I can't do that. It wouldn't be honest."

"Then why are we here?" I asked him as soon as we walked out of the shop. "Why did you just spend seven thousand dollars on three fakes?"

"Because they are beautiful," he replied, looking as if he had just wasted a lot of time on me. "Why else would you ever buy a rug?" ♦

THE STRANGENESS

The strangeness of others—
Even your sisters and brothers—
Is a responsibility to
Overcome—or some night they will be lying
In a bed dying—and *how* you loved them,
Its quality—will be as unknown
To you as your own mother was
While a living stranger.

—*Stan Rice*

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PROFILES

AFTER HILLARY

She doesn't like politics or public life. What will Tipper Gore do if she becomes the next First Lady?

BY ELSA WALSH

Last summer, on a late-afternoon campaign swing through Springfield, Massachusetts, Tipper Gore, the wife of the Vice-President, was asked a question by a local reporter: "My twenty-seven-year-old stepdaughter and her husband wanted to talk about your regulation of music lyrics." They wanted to know, she said, "How can Mrs. Gore say she is a liberal if she is interested in censoring music?"

The reporter was referring, of course, to Tipper Gore's celebrated, even notorious, campaign, in the mid-eighties, to persuade the record industry to give parents some warning of what their children were buying. I was just a few feet away from Mrs. Gore, and as I heard the question—a question that she has been asked countless times—I saw her face tighten. We were at a community clinic, and she had just participated in a panel discussion on how to improve health care in poor areas; she sounded exasperated. "Well, the first thing I'd say to them is that this is a misunderstanding, a very fundamental misunderstanding, and that I'm not interested in censoring music, nor was the group that I worked with. We were not interested in censoring anything."

Mrs. Gore has always said that she and her allies were simply trying to alert parents to the violent and sexual nature of some rock lyrics, many about the sexual degradation of women. Her opponents, however, painted her as a prudish housewife out to ban rock and roll, and the image has stuck in some quarters, particularly among young people. That lingering image still worries the Gore campaign. When ABC television conducted a Democratic focus group in New Hampshire in September, some participants said that Tipper Gore's crusade might keep them from voting for Al Gore for President. That period, which saw Mrs. Gore standing up to Frank Zappa, among others, was in many ways a terrifying experience, and played an essential part in her political education and her ambivalence toward public life.

The attacks on Mrs. Gore inevitably affected the four Gore children. "I hate it," Karenna, the oldest child, told the Atlanta *Constitution*. "But it's something she believes in." One of Karenna's favorite rappers, Ice-T, wrote a song lampooning Tipper. "That was upsetting," Karenna said in the *Times Magazine* recently. "I wanted to be cool, like a lot of 14-year-olds, and that definitely didn't help."

"They would go to parties with a large group of people, and I'm sure they had some unpleasant experiences, there's no question," Mrs. Gore told me not long ago. "But they all knew why I was doing it and what I was doing and that it was for the right reason. After all, they'd grown up with their grandfather Gore"—Albert Gore, Sr., a United States senator—"who was a strong role model for people standing up for what they believe in. And, you know, there's something to be said for passing that on to your kids." Tipper went on, "We were, if anything, just naïve and idealistic, I would say. And we were mothers, primarily, who were angry at what they felt was being sold to their, to my, kids. That's basically what motivated me."

A few years later, when her husband became Vice-President and issues about violence in entertainment were being debated, Mrs. Gore was quieter than friends expected. One top staff member recalled a period when the Vice-President kept telling the staff that he wanted to get Mrs. Gore more involved in a White House conference on television violence. "He kept saying, 'We have to include Tipper.' " This staff person, who had checked with Mrs. Gore's staff, told me, "I finally said, 'Sir, she doesn't want to be included this much.' "

These days, Mrs. Gore is focussed almost entirely on her husband's Presidential campaign, which takes her away from Washington for much of each week. It is ironic that Tipper Gore, although she seems to dislike public life, now spends so much of her time in front of crowds, and may move to the White House.

At present, she lives in the official residence of the Vice-President, a spacious white brick Victorian house with rambling porches and a turret. It is situated on twelve acres, high on a hill on the grounds of the U.S. Naval Observatory. The library, on the first floor, where I met with Mrs. Gore last fall, is a cozy room. The walls are a teal color, and photographs of the Gores and their handsome children are abundant. (Only one child, seventeen-year-old Albert, still lives at home.) Many of the pictures were taken by Mrs. Gore, a former news photographer. There are one or two candid pictures of President Clinton with the family, and a photograph of Nelson Mandela. Other than these, there are none of the "grip-and-grin" photographs prevalent in many Washington homes. The most prominent artifacts are a guitar signed by various country-music stars, like Patty Loveless and Kathy Mattea, and a 1934 oil painting, "Radio Broadcast," of a group of people around a table. The day I was there, a red drum set, a gift from the Vice-President, was in the foyer. (Mrs. Gore began playing drums at the age of fourteen.)

Mrs. Gore, who is fifty-one, has blond, shoulder-length hair and almost translucent blue eyes. Her weight goes up and down, most noticeably in her face and chin. When I visited the residence, she had just come back from a political lunch, and seemed tired and wary. By nearly every measure, the previous few weeks had been bad ones for the campaign. Former Senator Bill Bradley had pulled even with Gore in New Hampshire, and the press had written numerous stories about staff shakeups and concerns in the inner circle that the Vice-President did not have the will to win. (The next day, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, of New York, endorsed Bradley and dismissed the Vice-President, saying, "Nothing is the matter with Mr. Gore except he can't be elected President.") It was to be expected, then, that Tipper Gore might be on guard with a reporter. Trying to steer the conversation toward more comfortable ground, I mentioned that I'd learned that almost every Friday morning for a year and a half in the mid-nineties she had travelled on a medical van that provides services to the mentally ill and homeless in the District of Columbia.

For the next forty-five minutes, she was transformed. She laughed deeply; her voice became melodic and breathy. She told stories. She recounted how she had chased a homeless man named Jack down a crowded street, with Secret Service agents in pursuit, how he was nearly naked and she was in jogging clothes. She jumped up to get a photograph of Jack—he was wearing a white suit—that she kept on her bulletin board. She described a formal lunch she had given at the residence for some other homeless people she'd come to know. "It was like being at Grandmother's," she said. I was so startled by the change in her that, before I left, I asked if homelessness was what, outside her family, she cared about most, and she said that she supposed it was.

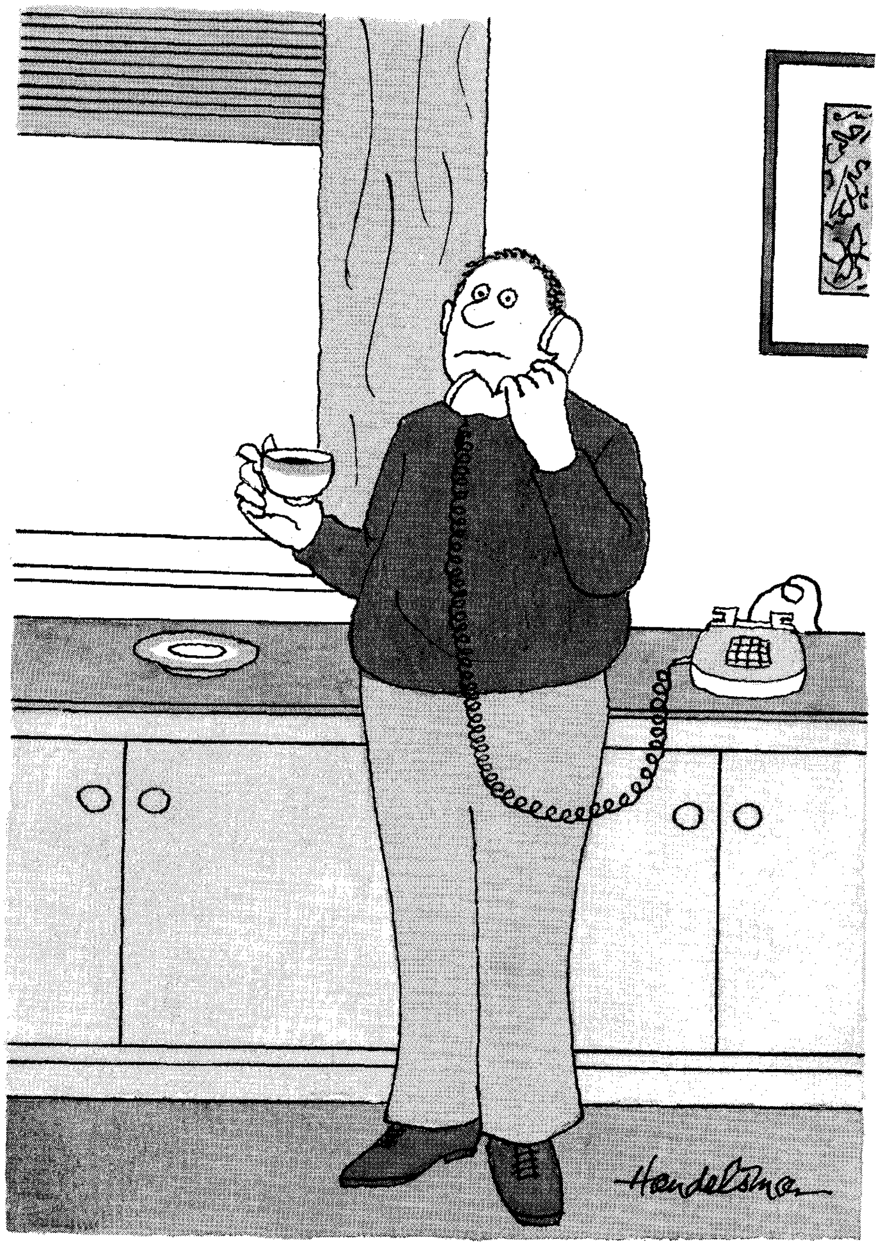
Patricia Letke-Alexander, a physician's assistant for Health Care for the Homeless, whom Mrs. Gore accompanied on those Friday-morning forays, told me that Mrs. Gore came along the first time because she was concerned. "Why she stayed with us was that she could come and be with folks and not be the Vice-President's wife," Letke-Alexander said. There was no press, and Mrs. Gore was rarely recognized. When I mentioned her reaction to Sally Aman, her former press secretary and a close friend, Aman said, "That was something that really fuelled her soul . . . . They didn't know who she was and couldn't care less, frankly. And she loved it. She loved it."

"She is the candidate in places the Vice-President cannot reach," a Gore staffer says of Tipper. Photograph by Tipper Gore.

Today, no doubt, Mrs. Gore would be more widely recognized. In the weeks leading up to the March 7th primaries, no other candidate's spouse has campaigned more prominently than Tipper Gore or has been made to define a campaign in quite the same way. Worried about Al Gore's likability, the campaign is using Tipper Gore to encourage voters to give her husband the benefit of the doubt. "She's one of the great validators he has," Michael Whouley, one of Gore's top advisers, told me.

That is also part of the puzzle of Tipper Gore. Although in many ways she is a reluctant political spouse, she is an ambitious and intelligent strategist—at times displaying far better political instincts than her husband. Mrs. Gore is credited with several of the decisions that led to the turnaround of his campaign. It was, for instance, Tipper, the Vice-President told me not long ago, who last fall urged that the campaign headquarters be moved to Nashville.

She is also regarded by the campaign as an important asset. Not long before Gore's caucus and primary successes in Iowa and New Hampshire, I was having dinner with Donna Brazile, Gore's campaign manager, at a Mexican restaurant near the campaign's headquarters. "We're running her ragged, having her out there campaigning all the time," Brazile said of Mrs. Gore, and then, in phrases she had certainly used before, she went on, "People know Al Gore from the shoulders up. Tipper allows people to know him from the shoulders down"—in other words, Brazile sees Mrs. Gore bringing a warmth to the campaign that the Vice-President is widely thought to lack. This month, according to her press office, Mrs. Gore has visited sixteen states; in one four-day period, she was on ten planes.



"I'm not trying to sell you anything, sir. I'm doing market research, and all I ask is two or three hours of your time to answer a few thousand questions."

Al Gore repeated the theme when I talked to him aboard Air Force Two (we were sitting in his private cabin, with a desk in one corner and an abdominal cruncher in another). He praised his wife's appeal to crowds and contrasted that with his own celebrated woodenness—he still tells Al Gore jokes. But there were no jokes when I mentioned that his wife had said that politics is one of the hardest lives a family can have. Had she ever asked him to get out of it?

"See, I'm part of that equation," Gore said. "She doesn't want me to make a choice that runs against what I feel called to do, and so if she were not convinced that I genuinely felt a calling to serve in this way she would definitely not want me to be in politics. But since she knows that I am who I am, then she wants to support me and make the best of it." Meeting Tipper, he continued, was an "epiphany" for him. "She's unlike anybody I've ever met. She has the biggest heart of anybody I know. She is the most authentic person I know."

I left the interview wondering how much he had thought about what he had just said—that, out of devotion to him, his wife endures a life she would never have chosen for herself. "She's a smart woman, but this is her husband's dream," Skyla Harris, her former chief of staff and an old family friend, explained, adding, "It doesn't mean she has to give up everything."

Of course, this is not Mrs. Gore's first campaign, but it is certainly her most visible one; and, if her husband wins his party's nomination, the country will get to know her much as it got to know Hillary Clinton eight years ago. Unlike Hillary Clinton, however, Tipper Gore tends to remind people of themselves. "I would watch Hillary Clinton walk through the West Wing with about a five-foot protective space around her," Lorraine Voles, the Vice-President's former spokeswoman, recalls. "Hillary was so regal that people wouldn't intrude on her space. People didn't feel that way about Tipper. Tipper would come in dressed in sweats, or something like that, and people would approach her. She couldn't signal people to stay away, even when she might have wanted to."

Mrs. Gore doesn't have Hillary Clinton's star quality. She is not a polished speaker; she usually doesn't follow a scripted text, and sometimes goes off on a tangent. When a voter in Iowa asked her view of corporate mergers, she began talking about urban sprawl. When she gets anxious, her neck reddens, and she's slow to recover. "Has anything happened yet that's rattled her?" was a CNN producer's first question to me when he arrived on an Iowa trip. But for the most part Mrs. Gore does well, often displaying a quick wit. When a member of a panel that she was moderating in Hartford, Connecticut, nervously acknowledged that maybe she needed to get to the end of her life story, Mrs. Gore leaned over and said, "No, no, this is your own Academy Awards." The audience loved it. What the press sometimes finds lacking in lustre—"That was about as exciting as a nine-volt battery," one television reporter complained after the Hartford event—others find her most attractive quality.

"An interesting selection, Dad, yet essentially a failure—as you can see, I'm still awake."

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Mary Elizabeth Aitcheson (her grandparents nicknamed her Tipper from a lullaby her mother sang) met Albert Gore, Jr., at his high-school graduation dance in 1965; he attended St. Albans, in Washington, and she was a junior at a nearby girls' school. Five years later, they were married, and, after Al finished a five-month stint as an Army journalist in Vietnam, the two moved to Carthage, Tennessee, a rural town fifty miles outside Nashville. The family had a farm in Carthage, and Al, as a boy, had spent summers there. Tipper Gore says she thought her husband might be a writer or a lawyer, and this suited her just fine. She did not expect him to follow his father, a three-term senator, who lost his seat in the Vietnam era, after a nasty, divisive campaign, which had left Tipper and Al, Jr., with a feeling that there was a better way to live. Tipper wanted to do something meaningful—she had majored in psychology at Boston University and thought of becoming a child psychologist—but she did not feel that she had to have a career.

What she did want, she says, was a family. "You know how people are when they get married," she told me during a conversation at the residence. "You dream about your family, talking about how many children you're going to have and what their names are going to be and what do you think they'll be—that was back in the days before you could know. Anyway, we both wanted six children." Tipper's own parents had separated when she was four years old, and her mother, who had a history of depression and had been hospitalized for it, worked full time as an accountant. (Her father owned a successful plumbing-supplies business.) In that era, working women were not regarded with great respect in their Arlington, Virginia, neighborhood, and being divorced was even more suspect. Having divorced parents made her feel odd and alone, she said.

After Al and Tipper's first daughter, Karenna (a name inspired by the Tolstoy heroine), was born, in 1973, Tipper was eager to do something for herself. Al was working nights as a reporter at the Nashville *Tennessean* and attending divinity school during the day. She was taking care of the baby. Encouraged by her husband and a close friend who was a photographer, she enrolled in a photography class, commuting a hundred miles round trip to attend. She also enrolled in the master's program in psychology at George Peabody College, at Vanderbilt University. The photography class led to a part-time job at the *Tennessean*. "I was as happy as I had ever been," she recalled. Al quit divinity school after two years and, still working at the *Tennessean*, started attending law school.

Then, in March of 1976, Al told her that the veteran congressman from their district was retiring and that he was thinking of running himself. Tipper's career as a photographer was just beginning, and, as she later wrote, she did not want to be "totally swept up" in her husband's life; she said that she would campaign only on her days off. But, with nine candidates competing in the primary, he needed her full time. A first cousin of Tipper's agreed to help take care of Karenna for the summer, and Tipper started driving the back hills of the district, going to coffees and making speeches. Gore won the primary, and in November he won the seat. Tipper, meanwhile, was pregnant with their second child, Kristin, who was born in June of 1977.

When the Gores moved into a rented house on a cul-de-sac in Arlington, where Tipper had grown up, and where her grandmother still lived, Tipper quickly discovered that official Washington had little interest in people like her—congressional wives. "Almost all of us had been a partner in our spouse's campaign and yet we came to Washington and there was no real niche here for us," she said. She and Chris Downey, who was married to then Representative Thomas Downey, of New York, became close friends. What they had in common was a feeling of disorientation, a sense that everything now revolved around their political husbands. "When you meet someone and you fall in love, it's fifty-fifty. I have friends, he has friends. I have family, he has family," Downey told me one day over coffee. "When you come to Washington, it's more like ninety-ten—if you're lucky. And then it's ninety-ten the other way at home. You do ninety per cent because you're providing the quality of the home life." Tipper, she said, adjusted better than she did, but still seemed surprised to find herself in this situation. "She said Al said he would never do it—he was so disinclined to the life," Downey recalled.

Mrs. Gore and twenty or so other women formed the Congressional Wives Task Force (eventually, there were about seventy), and for the next three years they met once or twice a month for tutorials on issues that affected families, with a goal of issuing reports to Congress. Their first subject was children and television violence; Tipper co-wrote the report, which was distributed to every member of Congress. "We were probably on the cutting edge of it because we had small children who were watching it," Tipper says. Federal rules required "a meaningful effort" to provide programming for children, and the wives' group was not easy to ignore. The group also issued reports on the elderly and on nutrition, but by 1980 it was beginning to dissolve.

Meanwhile, Tipper found herself increasingly on her own. Her husband's schedule was unpredictable—for example, a vote could go on all night—and that meant she couldn't depend on his help. Three out of four weekends, Al travelled to Tennessee; at one point, she told me, his sister suggested that she hire a nanny. "It was very hard for me," Tipper said. "I always felt I was supposed to take care of everything myself. I could do it. It was a sign of failure or something if I needed to admit that I needed some help with the kids"—the Gores' third daughter, Sarah, had been born in January of 1979—"and this is different from guilt. This is a resistance to the whole idea. This is my domain. I should be able to handle this."

In those days, Tipper and Al started going away for a weekend without the children once every few months, someplace nearby where they could hike. "I think it's only natural that there are going to be rough times in any relationship, and I think it's important to be honest about that," she told me. To fill what she called the "void," she built a darkroom in the house after Sarah was born and started freelancing. She published photographs in the Washington *Post* and the Washington *Star* and began working for trade publications. She joined a women photographers' group. Jodi Cobb, a photographer with *National Geographic* and a member of the group, recalled one photograph in particular: "It was of her two daughters bathing. The light was beautiful, and the image was intimate and very strong. Her warmth was evident. She had a very open and natural style." Eventually, though, she gave up freelancing. The Gores' only son, Albert, was born in 1982, and, with her husband running for—and easily winning—an open Senate seat in Tennessee, she had enough to do. "Photography," she later wrote, "is a way of keeping alive the part of myself that is not shared with anybody else."

Mrs. Gore says that the record-industry controversy began for her in late 1984, when Karenna, who was eleven, asked her to listen to a cut on the Prince album "Purple Rain."

DOG ON A CHAIN

So that's how it's going to be,
A cold day smelling of snow.
Step around the bare oak tree
And see how quickly you get
Yourself entangled for good.
Your bad luck was being friendly
With people who love their new couch
More than they love you.

Fred, you poor mutt, the night
Is falling. The children playing
Across the road were cold,
So they ran in. Watch the smoke
Swirl out of their chimney
In the windy sky as long as you can.
Soon, no one will see you there.
You'll have to bark even if
There's no moon, bark and growl
To keep yourself company.

—*Charles Simic*

The song, "Darling Nikki," went, "I knew a girl named Nikki / I guess you could say she was a sex fiend / I met her in a hotel lobby / Masturbating with a magazine." Tipper loved rock and roll—in high school she formed an all-girl band, the Wildcats. But "Darling Nikki," she felt, went unacceptably beyond the racy lyrics of the genre. How many other parents, she wondered, were giving "Purple Rain" to their children?

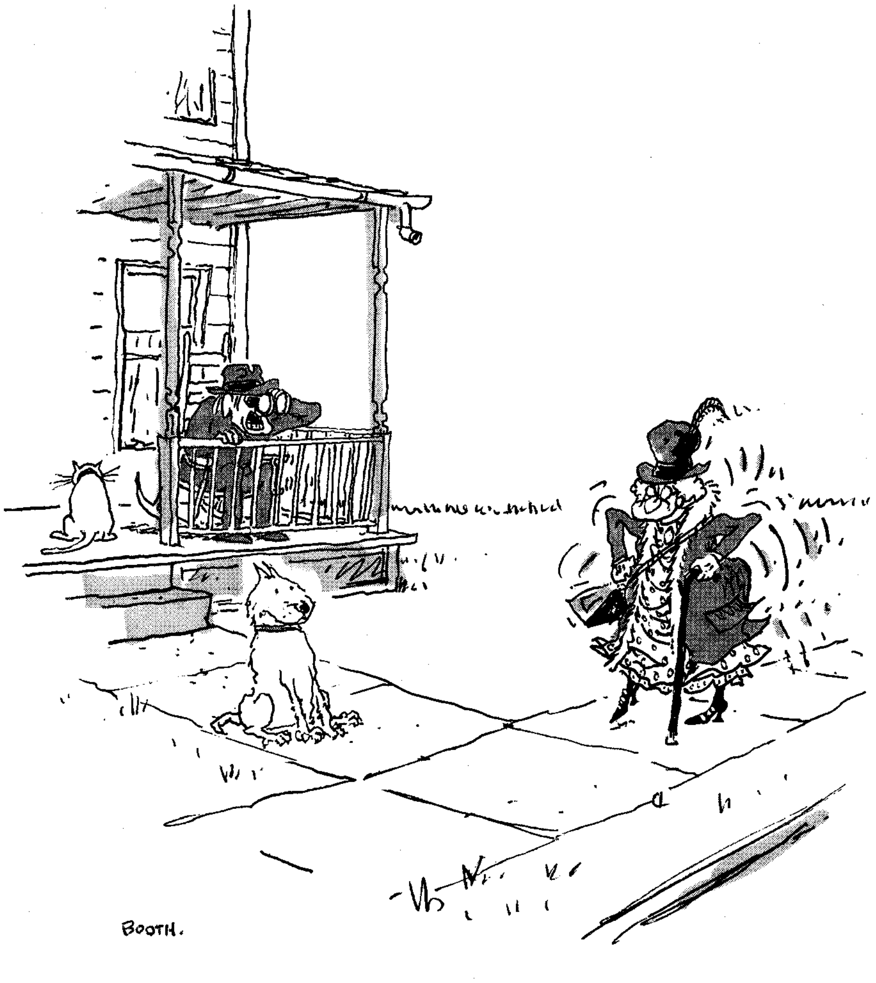
Her friend Susan Baker, the wife of Treasury Secretary James Baker and a mother of eight, had talked about organizing a forum for parents to discuss the issue, which by now included the videos shown on MTV. Soon the Parents Music Resource Center was born, and in May of 1985 Tipper Gore, Susan Baker, and the wives of fifteen representatives and senators wrote to the president of the Recording Industry Association of America, proposing a rating system similar to the one used by the movie industry.

The group had been warned by a recording-industry insider that it would be no match for prominent rock stars. Friends told Tipper Gore that she would be used by right-wing groups, and that she risked being turned into a Carrie Nation caricature. But Tipper, who had listened to songs like the Dead Kennedys' "I Kill Children" and was appalled, did not back down. Chris Downey said, "It triggered something in her—it was spiritual. She had to do this." Tipper's advisers were right to warn her. One record executive formed the Musical Majority and lined up stars like Daryl Hall and John Mellencamp. By August, Frank Zappa, who had made a career out of the outrageous, had become the recording industry's spokesman. Calling the women "cultural terrorists," he said, "No person married to or related to a government official should be permitted to waste the nation's time on ill-conceived housewife-hobby projects such as this."

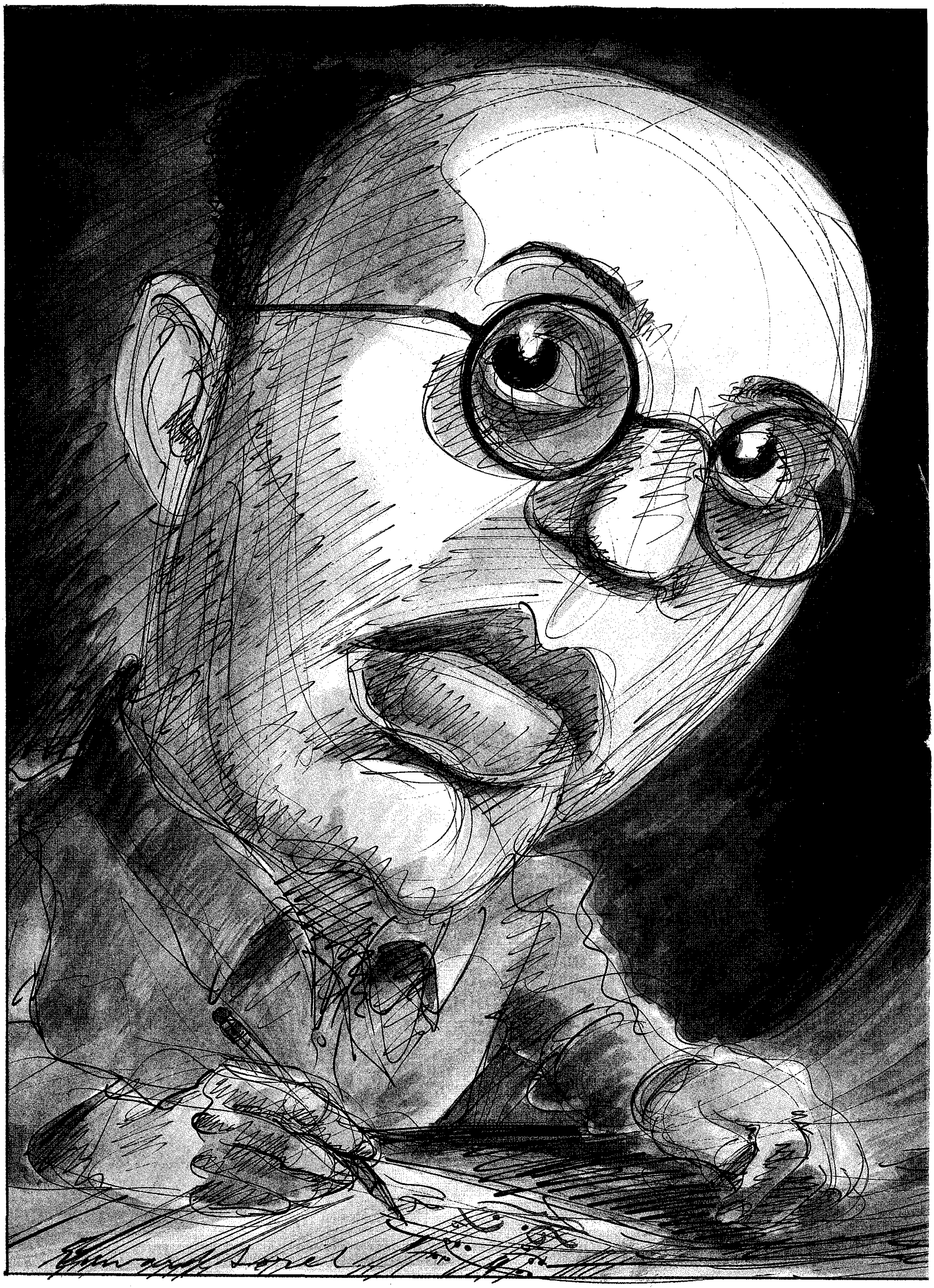
In September, at the invitation of the New York chapter of the National Association of Recording Arts & Sciences, Tipper participated in a panel on explicit lyrics. She was assured that the discussion would be open and fair, but, once she arrived, it was clear that she had underestimated her opponents. Among them was the punk-rock singer Wendy O. Williams. "Rock and roll has always meant sex," Williams, who wore an "Eat Your Honey" T-shirt, said. "But maybe it's not fucking that you're against; maybe it's just masturbation that you find offensive." Perhaps Tipper was upset, Williams continued, because she worried about her own children masturbating. "When is it all right for a child to masturbate?" she asked. It was a public humiliation, Tipper said later, and "one of the worst nights of my life."

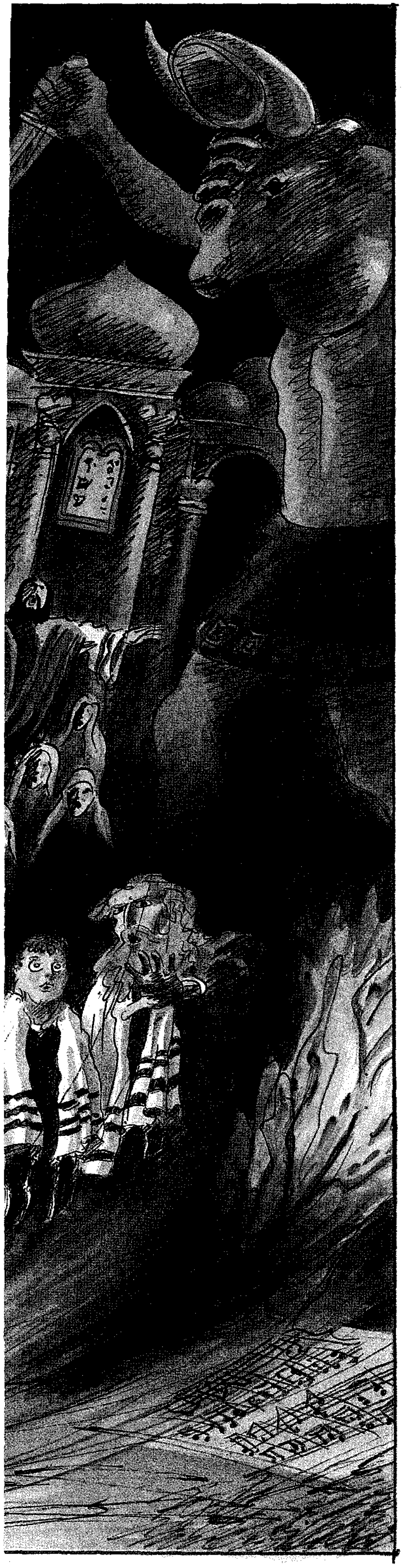
Nine days later, while some of the other political wives who had aligned themselves with the P.M.R.C. were beginning to retreat, Tipper Gore testified before the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee, in a highly publicized hearing that included rock stars and featured insults on all sides. Shortly thereafter, the P.M.R.C. agreed to drop its request for a uniform rating system, in exchange for an agreement by the record companies that they would, at their own discretion, put the warning label "Explicit Lyrics—Parental Advisory" on certain albums. But the personal attacks only intensified. *Spin* ran a satire called "Tipper Gore's Diary." *Hustler* named her "Asshole of the Month." "Ah, Tipper, come on," the Ramones sang. "Ain't you been getting it on?"

Al Gore's first campaign for President, in 1987, could not have come at a worse time for Tipper, who was in the middle of a tour promoting a book she had written, "Raising PG Kids in an X-Rated Society," as an outgrowth of her record-lyrics campaign. Nor did it help that Tipper, as usual, hadn't got much warning from her husband about his ambitions. By the time he told her he was thinking about running, he had to make a decision almost immediately. "I think Al thought that if he didn't tell Tipper, if he made



"Jehoshaphat! Look at that gait!"


Edward Sorel



EASEL BY EDWARD SOREL

LOST HIGHWAY

For decades, Kurt Weill's "The Eternal Road," a pageant opera mixing Biblical stories and scenes of European Jewish life, gathered dust in Lotte Lenya's closet. Stories of its ill-fated première—at the Manhattan Opera House, in 1937—may have encouraged its neglect. Max Reinhardt, the director, spent around five hundred thousand dollars, an obscene sum at the time. Norman Bel Geddes, the stage designer, rebuilt the theatre from top to bottom. Franz Werfel, the librettist, was uncoöperative. "Why all the scenery, why all the music?" he asked. The first performance ran until 3 A.M.

It was strange to find Weill, the unsentimental composer of "Mack the Knife," mixed up in this extravaganza. In Berlin, in the late twenties, he had been the master of lean and hungry music, writing songs that were as acidulous as they were hummable. But once he left Germany, in 1933, his style softened. During his American exile, he disavowed the edgy brilliance of his Berlin period, saying, "I'm sorry I wrote that sort of thing."

"The Eternal Road," which plays in a mercifully streamlined version at BAM through March 5th, shows Weill in transition. On the one hand, he writes swelling climaxes that would have pleased Cecil B. De Mille. Yet the score also draws cannily on centuries of German music, from Bach to Mahler, and on Jewish tradition. Weill was the son of a cantor, and he saved his strongest music for the scene in which S.S.-like troops drive a congregation from its synagogue. Werfel's libretto suggests that the Jews will simply move on to another place, as they have always done; in the BAM staging, the opera ends with a premonition of the Holocaust.

—*Alex Ross*

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the decision, maybe it would go away," Chris Downey says. "'I've spilled ink on the rug, I'll put this chair over the stain, and she won't notice, and if she notices, hell, she can't stay mad forever.'"

Tipper tried to focus on her husband's agenda, but almost every interviewer wanted to ask about censoring rock lyrics. Gore's advisers, she was told, were saying, "Please rein her in. This is killing your campaign." The campaign's demise, though, probably had little to do with Tipper's crusade. Although Gore had a strong showing in some Southern states on Super Tuesday, he dropped out after losing the New York primary.

A year later, on April 3, 1989, Albert, who was then six, darted across a Baltimore street following the Orioles' Opening Day game and was hit by a car. Tipper rarely speaks about the accident, but in a book of her photographs, "Picture This," published in 1996, she wrote in the accompanying text, "I watched in horror as he flew through the air, scraped along the pavement, and then lay still. It was the most terrifying thing I have ever witnessed. He had so many broken bones and internal injuries that for days it was not clear whether he would survive."

For the next month, the parents kept a vigil at Albert's bedside, moving into the Johns Hopkins Children's Center, in Baltimore. It was "a very spiritual time for both of us," Tipper wrote. The family went into therapy and consulted books on family psychology. In a profound sense, Al and Tipper began to reëvaluate how they were living their lives. "At the time, I was having a schedule of a full-time career person, although I was doing it a bit differently," Tipper told me. "I was making speeches. I was travelling. I just stopped and said, 'I've become way too busy. I don't want to do this anymore. I don't like this.' So it caused me to change my priorities, definitely."

Recently, Mrs. Gore revealed that, after her son's recovery from the accident—which took two years—she became clinically depressed and was put on medication. "I was working hard, like anybody who has this illness, on all cylinders and then [trying] to pretend everything was fine,” she said in *USA Today*. And it was, she said, “extremely frightening.” The Gores say that their son’s accident was one of the determining factors in Al Gore’s decision not to seek the Democratic nomination in 1992, although it didn’t hurt that George Bush looked unbeatable after the Gulf War. Gore finally ruled it out, in the summer of 1991, following a family vacation, and Tipper called his decision a “gift.”

When, in the summer of 1992, Bill Clinton asked Al Gore to be his running mate, Tipper might have been expected to object. But a close friend says Tipper believed that the campaign could be a trial run—to prove to herself that she had conquered her depression. In addition, it still looked as if Bush would win. “This was positive stress,” the friend said. Furthermore, Tipper told others that, if Clinton won, the Vice-Presidency would be better for the family; for one thing, Gore would not be travelling back to Tennessee so often. Yet friends noticed a tentativeness to her involvement. “I think she’s more comfortable in the role of observer than in that of participant,” says Bob Boorstin, a former Clinton White House aide who worked closely with Tipper on the campaign and in the White House. “I just think she was truly happy on the bus tours when she was off the stage taking pictures of the other three. You could see the difference in her face.”

As Vice-President, Al Gore told me, he often counts on on his wife’s judgment. “Some issues that involve a detailed analysis of a subject area where she hasn’t been a part of the analysis, she’s not going to say, ‘You know, here’s my reading of the evidence,’ because that’s not what she does,” he said. “But if she has been involved in an issue, like Central America or Rwanda”—where she made relief visits—“or mental health or homelessness, then I’m going to rely on her very heavily, and do.”

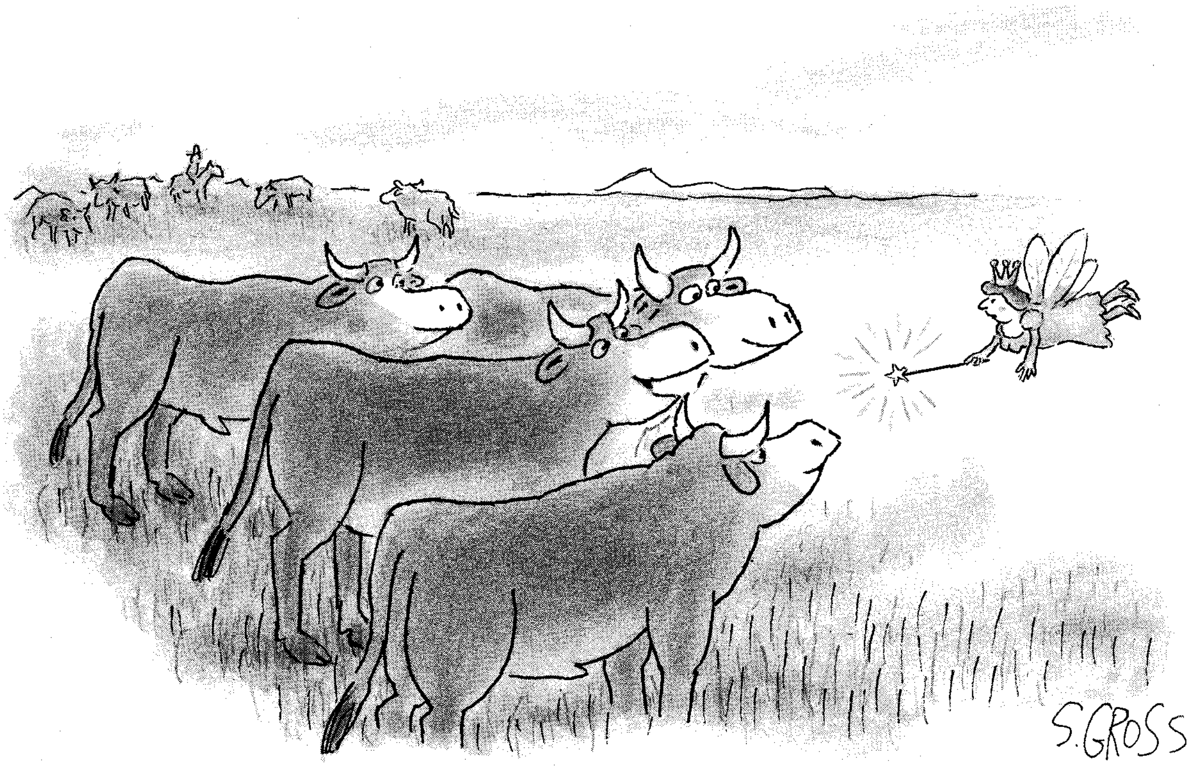
One of Gore’s senior advisers told me much the same thing—that Mrs. Gore is not interested in policy generally (the way Hillary Clinton is) but focusses on particular issues and on her husband. But this person also said, “She is certainly the most influential adviser he has. In many ways, she’s more influential than Hillary. Clinton has a lot of friends and advisers, whole circles of people who may counter what Hillary has to say. . . . So while he might consider Hillary’s advice he has his own experience and his other advisers. Al and Tipper are really a small circle, and Tipper is in a category of one. She is the person who is his strongest and most important sounding board.” Because of this, one former top Gore aide told me, “we had one rule—one hundred per cent, one hundred per cent of the time. That was our Tipper rule: Whatever she wanted, give it to her and give it to her then.” A former Clinton adviser told me, “She’s much tougher than anyone imagines.” At a strategy meeting in 1995 that was called to try to prop up the Clinton Presidency after the disastrous 1994 midterm elections, he recalled, Tipper lashed out at “leakers” and said people “should get on board or get off.”

Al Gore, his advisers say, tends to be cautious and measured in his thinking, while Tipper tends to be more intuitive. Sally Aman, her former press secretary, told me, “She will tell him how she feels about an issue, and, while often he can get mired down in the details and the technicalities, going to her is like stepping back from all that and saying, ‘O.K., what does this mean?’ ”

Tipper Gore’s principal contribution to the Administration has been as the President’s mental-health policy adviser, a job that Clinton asked her to take on after she told him about her mother’s depression. As a result, mental-health issues have received far more attention from the Administration than they might have otherwise. Among the efforts she is proudest of, she says, was to force a change in the way mental illness is treated in government personnel screening. The question “Have you ever seen a psychiatrist?” is no longer next to “Have you ever committed a felony?” and applicants are no longer required to divulge whether they’ve had marriage or family counselling. But perhaps the most significant step she took with mental health was to talk about her own. “I was looking for the right time,” Mrs. Gore told me. She said she had been speaking around the country to high schools, and a student approached her after one of her appearances. “She said that her sister had attempted suicide and that she was depressed, but that she didn’t want to come forward and get the help because of the stigma associated. She’d seen it with her sister. Then she started crying and I encouraged her to get the help that she needed and that it would be all right. I told her I understand. I understand. I’ve been there. You must do this. I checked back with her.” That was the turning point.

Tipper knew that people would speculate—and they do—that her decision last year to write about her own depression was political, intended to blunt a “revelation” in the 2000 campaign. She also worried that someone might tell her son that he was to blame. She drew the line, however, at revealing what medication she had taken or when the depression occurred or how long it lasted, except to say that it came after Albert’s accident. When I said that some mental-health professionals believe that her lack of specificity perpetuates the stigma, she disagreed. “I’ve decided I want to talk about it in order to help people, but I don’t want to be the poster person for depression.”

Everyone I talked to about Tipper Gore said that she hated the lack of privacy that came with being the wife of the Vice-President. To me she said, “I don’t really think there is anything that can prepare you. It’s like childbirth.” Then she laughed. “I believe in Ronald Reagan’s Star Wars shield for me personally.” Friends of



"We would like to be genetically modified to taste like Brussels sprouts."

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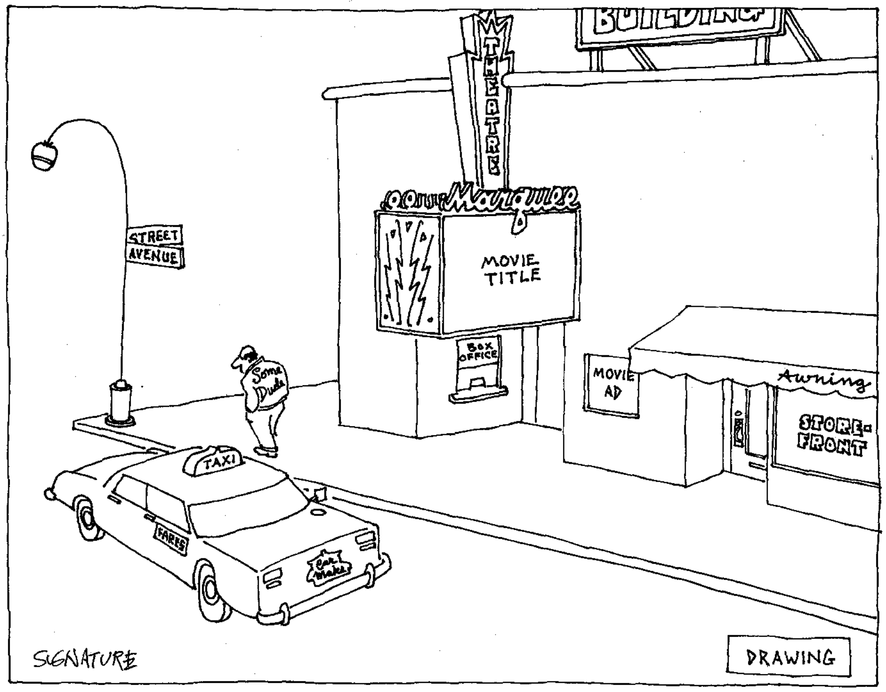
the Gores and members of their staffs say that she complained about the continuous presence of staff people and about around-the-clock Secret Service protection. She stopped having personal conversations with her husband in the car because two Secret Service officers were in the front seat. She created a "family zone" on the second floor of the Vice-Presidential residence, and the Navy stewards who worked in the house were supposed to enter only when the children were not at home and the Vice-President was away. She signed out of Secret Service protection for at least one weekend to go camping with a daughter. At their children's athletic games, which one or both Gores were sure to attend, they often sat by themselves in the bleachers or on the sidelines, away from others, one parent said.

Tipper also did outlandish things, apparently to show that she would not be controlled. One afternoon, she jumped on the back of a political aide's motorcycle for a ride to the residence. During the 1996 Convention, she leaped fully clothed into Lake Michigan while jogging with a Washington *Post* reporter, certainly aware that that would be the picture of the day—and it was.

Like other public figures, the Gores have tried to protect their children from unwelcome attention. Some of the inevitable news stories were merely irksome. Tipper has said that the children refused to go bowling after the *Times* reported their scores. Other incidents were far more unsettling. In September of 1995, sixteen-year-old Sarah Gore was cited, along with eleven other juveniles, for possession of alcohol at a party in suburban Maryland. Some news stories reported that Sarah had said to the police, "Don't you know who I am?" Both Gores were furious at the suggestion that their daughter had pulled rank. To a friend, the Vice-President exploded, "Anyone who knew my daughter knew she wouldn't say something like that." Sarah was the child who most hated the trappings of official Washington; for an art project at school, she submitted a photo essay that showed her standing behind bars at the residence.

In 1996, the Gores had to answer calls from the press about Albert, who was thirteen and a student at St. Albans, and had been caught, with a couple of friends, using an illicit substance. The Gores, according to staff members, believed that the story had been leaked by other parents at St. Albans to embarrass the Vice-President. When it became clear that something stronger than statements from staff members was needed, Al Gore called reporters himself. "He would call them and talk to them as a father," a staff person said. When another staffer warned the Vice-President that the calls might come back to haunt him, Gore replied, according to this person, "Albert's so important. I feel I need to do this for him." To another staff member the Vice-President insisted that the substance was oregano. Most publications, in reporting the incident, agreed to the Vice-President's request not to use Albert's name, though it appeared in British papers. It wasn't until 1998 that a monthly publication, the *Washingtonian*, mentioned Albert's name in a story about St. Albans.

Although the Gores were furious at the invasion of their children's pri-



vacy, Tipper approved of her husband's emotional description of their son's accident in his 1992 Democratic Convention speech. "Tipper doesn't understand that you don't get to pick and choose your privacy," one staffer says, and wonders how Tipper would cope with living in the White House, where the scrutiny is more intense. "Tipper hates the press, much more so than him," this person says. "She thinks the press is always lying in wait to do a 'gotcha' story."

When I asked a few of Mrs. Gore's friends about her depression, I was chastised—"I'm afraid I'm leading the lamb to slaughter," one said. When I reminded this person that Mrs.Gore herself had raised the subject, I was told, "What Mrs. Gore is going to be most upset about is that so many of her friends talked, that they felt comfortable talking about her. She is going to feel betrayed. She doesn't like it when people trade on their friendship." Another staff person told me, "Tipper's attitude is that people should give her a break. That she's just along for the ride. This is Al's thing."

If Mrs. Gore sees much of her life—particularly her public life—as a painful yet necessary sacrifice to her husband's political career, then, as the stakes rise, so does the level of her sacrifice. In the final years of the Clinton Administration, the stress of public life intensified for the Gores. For the first time, Gore's integrity was being questioned: he was criticized for attending what turned out to be a fund-raiser at a Buddhist temple and for making fund-raising calls from the White House to potential donors. One major business figure likened the calls to a "shakedown." Gore was identified as the "solicitor-in-chief," and in 1997 the Attorney General initiated an investigation.

One senior staff member said, "In meetings she would say, 'Al is a good person. Al is an honest person. He didn't do anything wrong. He just did what he was asked.' " She was angry at the people who had asked her husband to make the phone calls. She was angry that people in Washington who'd known him as an honest person—the pundits, the congressmen—weren't defending him. She also was annoyed with his staff. "She has a blind belief in him—she cannot accept that he did something wrong," this staff person said. "That's the sweet side of her loyalty. The less sweet side is that they both have a tendency to blame others when something goes wrong." When Gore wanted to defend himself at a press conference the day after the "solicitor-in-chief" story appeared, Tipper urged him to do it, even though his staff was opposed. The results were disastrous, with the Vice-President, in an effort to explain the calls, repeating the now notorious phrase "no controlling legal authority" seven times. "He wasn't prepared," the senior staff member added. "He didn't have the facts. But he kept saying, 'I'm innocent. I know I'm innocent.' She was pushing him to do it because he wanted to do it."

Mrs. Gore told me that when she watched Bill Clinton announce, on January 26, 1998, "I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky," she was relieved. "I said, 'Oh good. I believe him.' " She liked the Clintons. The two couples had operated as a team, and in the early days the Clintons or the Gores might "drop in" at the others' house for dinner. But friends say that the relationship started to sour as soon it became clear that Clinton had indeed had a sexual relationship with a twenty-three-year-old intern. They say that Mrs. Gore was deeply shaken as the truth about the Lewinsky scandal became clear. "The urgency to distance, that's where it's coming from," Bob Squier, one of Gore's media consultants, told me shortly before his death, in January. "It was a personal betrayal, and it is the centerpiece of where the Gores are now," another top strategist told me. "It's part of making sure the American people know who they are." In campaign appearances, Tipper Gore rarely mentions the President; instead, she regularly assures her audiences that her husband "will not let you down."

After Clinton's famous denial, Tipper told a close political friend that she didn't know what to think. "She was wondering what people were saying," the friend said. "What were the members of Congress saying? What was the right thing for Al to do?" This friend said she told Tipper that the Vice-President needed to be loyal but should keep his head low. Important congressional elections were coming up, with the Democrats hoping to gain seats in the House. Tipper began to feel not only disappointment in Clinton but bitterness about other things as well. "Everything they had been working on would be completely eliminated, and in its place you'd have this stuff that was going to go on and on and on," Bob Squier told me. "That Al was working on. That the President was working on. That she was working on in mental health. Everything on the schedule was going to just kind of turn to nothing."

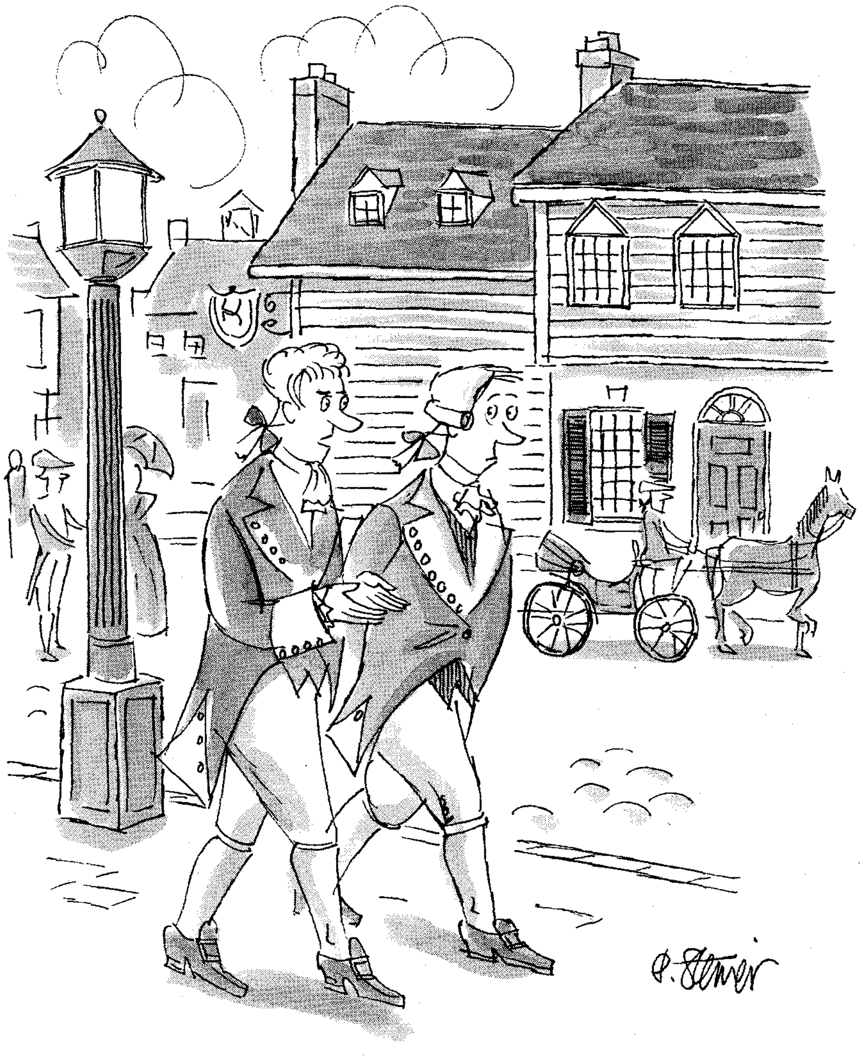
Tipper was not able to hide her feelings and she began appearing less frequently in public. When, in August of 1998, Clinton acknowledged his relationship with Lewinsky, and the independent prosecutor had DNA evidence to prove it, another friend said, "Any regard she may have had slipped away." Tipper Gore told her husband in so many words that Clinton's behavior was unforgivable. "It was abhorrent to her," Sally Aman told me. "The betrayal of trust and the whole thing. The betrayal of Hillary, the betrayal of his Cabinet, and the very act itself. I mean, she has a daughter that age." Aman said that at first, however, Tipper wasn't worried about the impact on her husband, because she couldn't believe anyone would associate that kind of behavior with the Vice-President.

When I talked to Mrs. Gore about the scandal, at the end of November, she was clearly uncomfortable and wouldn't answer questions directly, a reaction that Bob Squier had warned me to expect. "She's unprotected on this question," he had said. "I don't think she has any guard up at all." She was in a hurry that day; she was on her way to New York, for some campaign events and an afternoon with her new grandson, Wyatt, who was born last July 4th. "It was a hard time for everybody," she said. I asked her again about her reaction, and about the difficulty of maintaining a public face when she had a young daughter and was known as a person of strong moral values. "I know. I understand what you're saying. I was devastated for the Clintons. I knew the pain and everything they were going to go through, what they ought to be going through privately they were going to have to go through publicly. My heart went out to all of them, and I was very, very upset for everyone. I have a relationship with each of them as individuals and I responded, I think, that way." When I asked if she was worried about the impact on the Vice-President, she said, "No, not at that time. It was the impact it was having on them and the country. I'm not trying to duck you. I think I've answered that. I have to go."

On the day that the House voted to impeach Clinton, Tipper was not on the White House lawn when her husband proclaimed that Clinton "will be regarded in the history books as one of our greatest Presidents." She was, however, still in town.

In recent weeks, Gore has been reminding primary voters that they owe America's prosperity to the Clinton-Gore years; Clinton approvingly cited the Vice-President several times in his State of the Union message. But the Clinton-Gore relationship is still awkward. Several months ago, I asked for an interview with the President, and a top aide said that Clinton was willing to do it. But the aide told me that Clinton could not get an answer from "Gore-land" about whether the Gores want him to do it. More recently, Tipper Gore's staff people told the White House press office that they prefer silence from the President. When I heard this I felt almost embarrassed for Clinton, as if the Gores didn't want to invite the black-sheep brother to the wedding.

The distancing has extended to Hillary Clinton, other Gore staff people told me. Though Al Gore recently appeared with Mrs. Clinton in New York, and publicly Tipper Gore has had nothing but praise for the First



"A well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, we need cheap, available handguns."

Lady (in May, she introduced her as "the sunshine of all our lives"), a line praising Mrs. Clinton for her work on foster care was deleted from a draft of a speech that Tipper Gore was scheduled to deliver in October. The line was promptly removed after Mrs. Clinton made a favorable public reference to Bill Bradley, according to a person familiar with the speech. In the past ten months, the two women have had few public encounters. One of these was a White House conference hosted by Mrs. Gore. Another was a Gore fund-raising lunch in Los Angeles in June, which was delayed for an hour and a half while Mrs. Clinton held meetings. "It was just rude," said one person close to Mrs. Gore.

After the Lewinsky summer, Mrs. Gore spent more time with the feminist author Naomi Wolf, who was publicly critical of Clinton's behavior in the scandal, and whose association with the Gore campaign was later derided when it was revealed that she was advising Gore on his need to be an "alpha male" and telling him to wear earth tones. Wolf also advised Tipper, telling her to wear pink to one interview, and never to wear moss green.

Tipper Gore's staff people made fun of these fashion recommendations and were not enthusiastic about Wolf; they believed that she was giving Mrs. Gore inconsistent advice as she submitted speeches and mapped out media strategies. "One week she would tell Mrs. Gore that she needed to be the adoring wife," one person familiar with the conversations said. "Another week she would urge her to talk about being in charge of her own destiny. Another week she would tell her she needed to be a post-feminist woman, out front. There was no constancy in her message." Some on the staff were upset because of Wolf's focus on sex in her latest book, "Promiscuities."

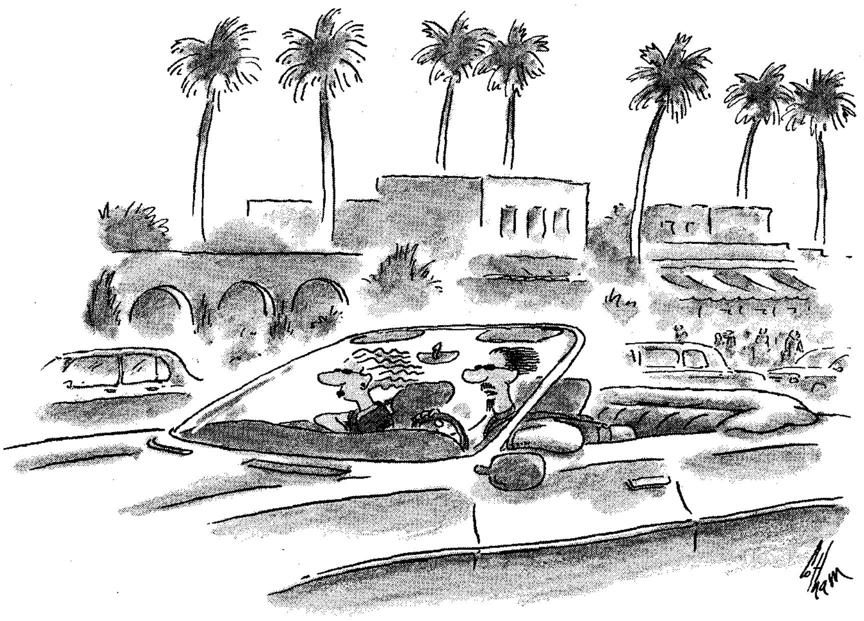
After about two months and many complaints by the staff to Mrs. Gore, this person told me, "it was clear that she wasn't a good fit" with Mrs. Gore's office—and Wolf dealt more with the Vice-President's staff. Camille Johnston, Mrs. Gore's press secretary, told me, "We took some of Naomi's advice, but a lot of it did not work, including things about media strategy." As for the controversy over how Al Gore should dress, the Vice-President told me it was Tipper who suggested that he adopt a more informal look on the campaign trail.

Sometime in the fall, when the Gore campaign was at its most troubled, Tipper told her husband that they had nothing to lose by going back to what had worked before. She urged him to return to the sort of campaigns he'd run in Tennessee—going door-to-door and holding town meetings. Not long after the Vice-President announced the move to Nashville, Tipper called Donna Brazile. According to Brazile, Mrs. Gore said, "When you are getting ready to close the doors on K Street and lock them for good, call me. I want to be there to help you lock the doors. I want to close that chapter." Brazile went on, "Tipper really hated the campaign operation pre-Nashville."

Mrs. Gore had started reporting as early as June that events weren't going well. "Long before our polls reflected a drop in New Hampshire, she warned us that something was happening up there," Brazile said. Tipper Gore told her husband's aides that the campaign was bloated and insufficiently committed to Al Gore. "She thought it reflected the Washington culture of the nineties," Brazile said. "The staff was about prosperity, good times. No one was eating at McDonald's anymore. They were going to the Oval Room. The Palm. Tipper didn't like that." She complained to the Gore strategist Carter Eskew that the campaign was leaking, that it needed to get control of the flow of information.

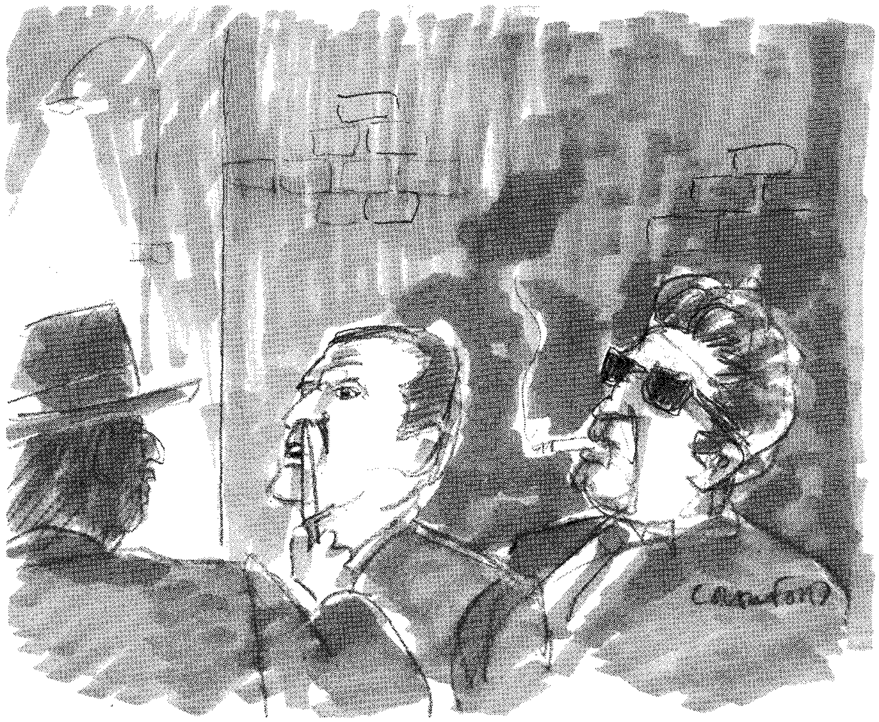
"She is passionate about protecting her husband," Eskew told me. "She felt that Al was not being served well by the campaign and by certain individuals. She was going to help make it right. She complained to me that too many people were speaking on behalf of the campaign who have multiple agendas. She said, 'Bill Bradley's campaign doesn't do that. George Bush's campaign doesn't do that. What are we going to do to fix this?' " Eskew went on, "She thought the campaign was not doing a good job being disciplined. She'd say, 'There's a discipline that the Bush campaign has that we don't have. Let's do something about it.' She has a healthy attitude toward problems: 'Let's not dwell on it. Let's fix it.' "

One of the fixes, from Tipper's point of view, was getting Tony Coelho, an investment banker and former California congressman, to become the



"We've been married a long time in Hollywood years."

campaign chairman. Tipper knew Coelho from his work on disabilities. (An epileptic, Coelho chairs the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities.) Tipper thought that he was "a very tough manager, and brings great organizational skills." Eskew said Mrs. Gore understood that Gore "had to get somebody to run the campaign. There were five or six guys who were co-equal. She was saying it wasn't working."



"Know what we do with nosy little creeps like you? We deprive them of their broadband data connections to the rest of the world, that's what we do."

Coelho was a controversial figure; in 1989, he had resigned from the House rather than face an ethics inquiry into a hundred-thousand-dollar junk-bond deal with a Democratic donor. But Coelho had a reputation as a master fund-raiser and organizer; he could control not only the staff but her husband, too. "There were stories after stories of Al Gore micromanaging the smallest of details, from how things are written on the Web to what direct-mail letters say and when they'll be going out," an adviser close to Coelho told me.

It was Tipper's story, though, not Al's, that brought Coelho into the campaign. Coelho told me that he had turned down a request from Gore himself, but changed his mind the next morning when he saw *USA Today* and read Tipper Gore's discussion of her own depression. As a young man, Coelho had been suicidal. He said that after he read Mrs. Gore's article he showed it to his wife, and told her, " 'You need to read it. Because it's going to change our lives.' She read it and said to me, 'I know what you're going to tell me.' " He said that he was impressed by Tipper's courage and what it represented. "It really struck me hard." Coelho told me that after he agreed to take the job he spoke with both Gores about his role. "Tipper was pushing for someone to take charge," he said. "We talked about the need for control, to make changes, put people in charge so Al isn't micromanaging the campaign."

As the campaign heads into what may be the decisive primaries, most of the top officials of the Gore campaign—people like Michael Whouley—seem to be "Tipper people." Even Brazile says, "Tipper Gore is the reason I'm here." Before becoming the campaign's manager, she says, she told the Vice-President, "I need to talk to Tipper before I decide what to do." Brazile, like others in the campaign, credits Tipper with the fundamental transformation of her husband from shielded candidate to a more approachable man.

Mrs. Gore has been among those pushing her husband to fight more. "Tipper is in a real attack mode," Ed Rendell, the chairman of the Democratic National Committee, told me recently. He had talked to Tipper a few days earlier and said he was surprised when she launched into an attack on the Bradley campaign. "I wanted to talk about the good things about the Gore campaign."

Still, others who know Tipper Gore say that if her husband didn't really want the Presidency she wouldn't hesitate for a second. "If you know her at all and you know what she wants out of life, she doesn't want this campaign," Bob Boorstin, the former Clinton aide, said. One of their closest friends recently surmised that Tipper would prefer her husband to become a university president. In one of my last conversations with Mrs. Gore, I asked whether she liked campaigning. "I think we're very much a team where politics is concerned, particularly where campaigning is concerned," she told me. But she added, "He's the officeholder and then I do sort of my thing, and we're still a team in the sense that we talk to each other and advise each other. But there is that difference." Her words sounded a little wistful, almost as if she were longing for something else. Chris Downey, whose husband lost his congressional seat in 1992 as Gore won the Vice-Presidency, seemed to know just what was on Mrs. Gore's mind. "Nobody has to tell her that this is a win-win situation," Downey told me. "Win, you get to be President, and if you don't win then you get to have your life back." ♦

LIFE AND LETTERS

THE HUNGER ARTIST

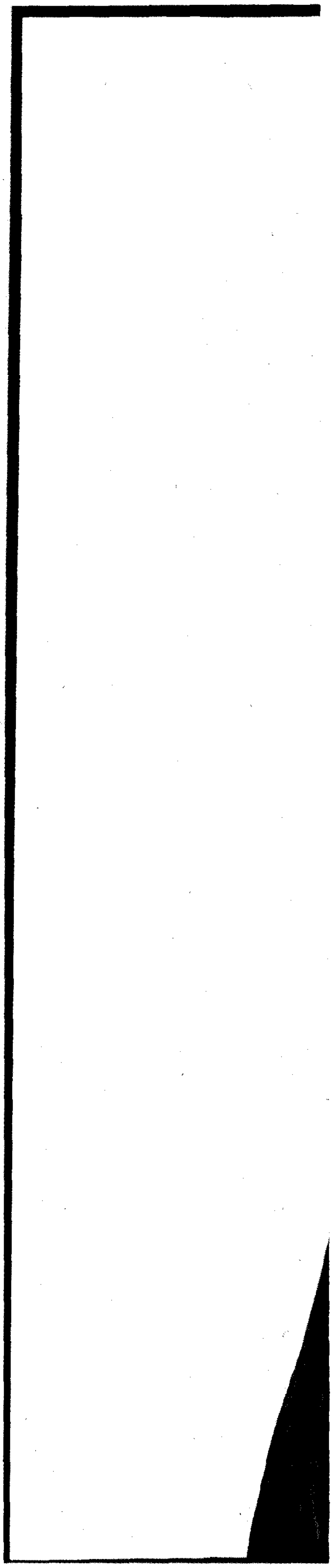
Is there anything Susan Sontag doesn't want to know?

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

Susan Sontag did two big things last year. She finished a novel, "In America," which is being published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux this week, and she underwent treatment for cancer. On a recent evening I said to her, "This is now your second novel in eight years, but it wasn't novels you were known for—it was essays. Don't you miss the essay form?" She answered something like "Essays! Pooh! Forget essays! That was the past. From now on, I'm writing fiction. I have a whole new life. It's going to be terrific." And she began charting for me her happy future. This was a person who that same morning, as she told me, had been scanned in every inch of her body for cancer. (Her recent episode was not the first. She had breast cancer in the late seventies.) Furthermore, as a result of chemotherapy—specifically, a drug called cisplatin, with a platinum base—she has heavy-metal poisoning. For months last year, she was in terrible pain—she lived on morphine derivatives, meanwhile trying to finish the book—and couldn't walk without help. Now she can walk, but her balance is still uncertain. "I don't know where my feet are unless I look at them," she told me. She has physical therapy for three hours every day.

Also on her daily schedule, however, are piano lessons. At the age of sixty-seven, she has started studying piano. Sontag has huge reserves of hope. Or maybe hope is the wrong word—too psychological. The quality seems physical. In "Pilgrimage," an autobiographical piece she wrote in 1987, she describes the patio barbecues of her childhood: "I ate and ate. . . . I was always hungry." When, as a young graduate student, she was trying to figure out what she would do for a living, she decided to become a writer because, as she later told Edward Hirsch for the *Paris Review*, "What I really wanted was every kind of life, and the writer's life seemed the most inclusive." A quality she repeatedly praises in the subjects of her essays is avidity: Jean-Luc Godard's need to cram into his films everything passing through his brain; Elias Canetti's deciding when he was sixteen that he would learn "everything," and pretty much succeeding; Walter Benjamin's endless book collecting. She, too, is a collector, both of subjects—she has written on literature, film, opera, drama, dance, painting, photography, politics, illness—and within subjects. Reading her "Illness as Metaphor," a book only eighty-seven pages long, I started keeping a list of the sources she brought to bear on her argument. After Choderlos de Laclos, Schopenhauer, Kant, Rousseau, Blake, Lermontov, Sartre, Camus, Katherine Mansfield, Middleton Murry, Baudelaire (a note he wrote for an unfinished book), Frank Lloyd Wright, Gramsci, Marinetti, Osip Mandelstam, Plato, Artaud, Machiavelli, Edmund Burke, Trotsky, Solzhenitsyn, Hitler, Neal Ascherson, John Adams, John Dean, St. Jerome, Novalis, Alice James, Henry James, Wilhelm Reich, Kafka, Wycliffe, Dickens, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Thomas Mann, Ingmar Bergman, Thomas Wolfe, Friedrich von Schlegel, Oliver Goldsmith, Saint-Saëns, the Goncourt brothers, Victor Hugo, Boccaccio, Homer, Sophocles, and various science-fiction movies, I stopped. When an interviewer commented that she must have done a lot of research for that book, she answered that she had done no research. She'd read a lot in her life, she said, and "I remember what I read." More than anything else, Sontag is hungry.

When "The Volcano Lover" was published, in 1992, many people thought



PHOTOGRAPH BY RICHARD AVEDON

Sontag says of her fiction, "I discovered that I liked to tell stories and make people cry."

Born to go binge-drinking, get pierced and tattooed, then wake up the next day really annoyed at myself for being such an idiot!

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it was her first novel. It wasn't. In the sixties she wrote two novels, "The Benefactor" and "Death Kit." "The Benefactor" is the story of a man pondering his dreams. "Death Kit" is a long hallucination occurring in the brain of a man who has taken an overdose of sleeping pills. Both books, then, were studies of consciousness. The world had little place in them. In keeping with the aesthetics of the sixties and, above all, with the so-called New Novel that the French were producing at that time, Sontag was trying to write anti-realistic, anti-nineteenth-century fiction. " 'Vanity Fair' and 'Buddenbrooks,' when I reread them recently . . . made me wince," she wrote in 1963. "I could not stand the omnipotent author showing me that's how life is, making me compassionate and tearful." Art was not life; it was *form*, life transfigured by consciousness—a process that, of necessity, made art difficult, reflexive, self-questioning. So in her novels she left out life and put in consciousness and was difficult and self-questioning, and the results were not very interesting, a fact that was not lost on her. "I didn't like what I wrote that much," she said to me. "That's why I stopped." In the meantime, she had begun publishing essays, and though she went on thinking of herself as a fiction writer—"I consider my novels much more important," she said in 1969 when an NBC interviewer asked her about her essays—she threw herself into critical writing, concentrating on the sort of New Wave, shattered-consciousness art that she herself had tried to produce. By the time of the publication of her first essay collection, the 1966 "Against Interpretation," with its famous title essay and its more famous "Notes on 'Camp' "—plus pieces on Lévi-Strauss, Simone Weil, Georg Lukács, Godard, "happenings"—she was a celebrity, a subject of articles in *Time* and *Vogue*, a person whom NBC wanted to interview.

As is always the case, this publicity explosion involved considerable stupidity. As always, it compromised its subject. (Sontag, who despises television—"It's the death of Western civilization"—did not decline to go on TV.) And so, as always, the new star had to suffer some sneering from her colleagues. Reviewing "Against Interpretation" in the *Times Book Review*, Benjamin DeMott said that the book left him with the haunting image of "a lady of intelligence and apparent beauty hastening along city streets at the violet hour, nervous, knowing, strained, excruciated (as she says) by self-consciousness, bound for the incomprehensible cinema, or for the concert hall where non-music is non-played, or for the loft where cherry bombs explode in her face." Note the remark on her beauty. Sontag was indeed beautiful, and since she is a woman, this contributed both to her fame and to the scorn it elicited.

The snide remarks didn't stop her. She was a natural star, extroverted, glamorous, photogenic. Eventually, she took to wearing her black hair with a white streak in it, like Diaghilev. ("Saturday Night Live" soon had a matching wig for its Sontag sendups. The streak is gone now. Sontag's post-chemotherapy hair is a big mane of gray.) She gave interviewers her thoughts not just on the arts, all the arts, but on politics, culture, history, you name it. She was outspoken, combative—a public figure—and she looked to be having a good time. This was not the American picture of braininess (we favor the professorial) but the Parisian model, and a number of American intellectuals had a problem with that.

But "Against Interpretation" was a brilliant book, a landmark in the history of American criticism. Not only did it serve what should be an essential function of criticism, that of introducing readers to new work, weird work, things they wouldn't ordinarily encounter—a duty no major critic had undertaken consistently since Edmund Wilson quit regular reviewing in the late forties—but, like Wilson's writings, it did so in a notably un-weird manner. Thoroughly trained in literature and philosophy, Sontag applied the standards of the past—truth, beauty, transcendence, spirituality—to the new art of the sixties, with its alienation, extremity, perversity. She talked like Matthew Arnold about things like Jack Smith's "Flaming Creatures," a film that was closed down by the police. Thus, whatever the new art's break with history (and she proclaimed the break), she made it seem a continuation of history, something that readers could understand, even sympathize with.

And the book was ambitious. Sontag asked what art was, what its use was, why we cared about it. She used the new art as a platform on which, it seemed, she invited us to live a bigger life, with new emotions, new thoughts, a new candor. (She talked very straight: "The two pioneering forces of modern sensibility are Jewish moral seriousness and homosexual aestheticism and irony.") And the writing was marvellous—high-toned, Brahmin, but full of zest and the pleasure of performing. Her openers were always thrown down with a great flourish. Here are the sentences with which she began the essay on Simone Weil:

> The culture-heroes of our liberal bourgeois civilization are anti-liberal and anti-bourgeois; they are writers who are repetitive, obsessive, and impolite, who impress by force—not simply by their tone of personal authority and by their intellectual ardor, but by the sense of acute personal and intellectual extremity. The bigots, the hysterics, the destroyers of the self—these are the writers who bear witness to the fearful polite time in which we live.

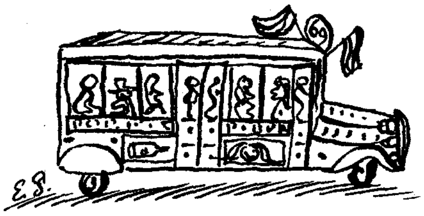
Well, maybe yes and maybe no, but she made it fun to think about. Add to this that the essays were short and easy to read. No wonder she was a hit.

In the years that followed, she brought out more essay collections, among them "Styles of Radical Will" (1969) and "Under the Sign of Saturn" (1980). Her pieces became longer, meditations on whole careers: Artaud's, Roland Barthes's, Walter Benjamin's, Elias Canetti's. Yet, as those names suggest, her concerns remained the same, mind versus reality, formalism versus realism, modern consciousness pressing against the walls of language. In 1977 she published "On Photography," an expression of adamantly mixed feelings about that art. (The book was a best-seller.) She followed this up in 1978 with "Illness as Metaphor," written as she underwent her first bout with cancer, and then, in 1989, with a sequel, "AIDS and Its Metaphors."

But in this post-"Against Interpretation" period one senses a restlessness in her. In the sixties and early seventies, she put a lot of time into the antiwar movement. She also went off and made films—a displacement, I believe, of the fiction-writing impulse. Nor did she always displace it. She wrote a number of short stories. In the eighties she started and then abandoned two novels, one about a dancer, the other about a Russian poet (based on her friend Joseph Brodsky) coming to the United States. She still thought of herself as a novelist.

Looking back now, one seems to see the novelist pacing around inside the essayist. The underlying argument of much of Sontag's criticism is a call for the replacement of realism by a more transforming technique. Yet a recurrent theme of her writing—a point she keeps returning to, like something personal—is the defense of reality *against* transformation. We hear about this first in the title essay of "Against Interpretation." There the reality she is defending is the work of art, obscured (and boy, was it) by Freudian and Marxist critics who were constantly looking past it to what they had decided it really meant. To quote the well-known last line of that piece, "In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art": we need to see art, smell it, feel it, take it for what it concretely is. By the time of "On Photography," the reality she is trying to protect is the world itself, our reactions to which are being dulled, she warns, by its constant conversion into the flat, glossy, comestible products of photography. In the following year comes "Illness as Metaphor," where the thing she is restoring to its realness is disease, specifically tuberculosis, which her father died from, and cancer, which at that moment she was close to dying from. In the book she did not mention her own condition. Whatever she felt was fed back into her argument, a short, violent conflagration at the end of which any idea that illness is a mark of ennoblement or of shame—something that the victim caused or, by virtue of personality, was doomed to—lies like a burnt cinder at the bottom of Sontag's rhetorical furnace. Illness is just illness, she says. Reality is just reality. Or not "just." Reality is interesting, powerful, a matter to which we should have strong, unmediated reactions. So said this anti-realist.

And there is something else. A curious trait of Sontag's critical writing is that, for all its polemical thrust, it often contains opposing views. The realism/anti-realism dance is one example. That occurs between essays. But even within essays she swerves and pivots, dips down and comes up somewhere else. A number of people have noticed her tendency to disagree with herself, and asked her about it—for example, Wendy Lesser, for a 1981 interview in *The Threepenny Review*. (This interview, together with many others, appears in Leland Poague's 1995 collection "Conversations with Susan Sontag.") Yes, Sontag answered, and that's because she was always thinking, "*This*, yes. But also *that*." To her, it didn't seem like disagreement, but "more like turning a prism—to see something from another point of view." This is not fundamentally the method of criticism. It is the method of the novel.



In 1992, a decade or so after that interview, Sontag produced "The Volcano Lover," her first novel in twenty-five years. It made the best-seller list, as well it might have, for it was not only wonderful but in many ways quite traditional. She who had said in 1963 that she couldn't abide the nineteenth-century omnipotent narrator, "showing me that's how life is, making me compassionate and tearful," gave us a wholly omnipotent narrator, a real bully, making us compassionate and tearful. She who had recoiled from the novel's sweaty realism—its loves, its wars, its teeming backdrops—gave us the famous love story of Emma Hamilton and Horatio Nelson, set in Naples, teeming as never before, in the time of the Napoleonic wars. The opposing voices of the essays now found their freedom in fiction, in a long list of characters with different points of view. The loyalty to reality, to the concrete facts of experience, exploded like a delayed reaction. At one point, the novel's hero—Sir William Hamilton, Emma's cuckolded husband—imagines a marble goddess in a garden coming to life. The first sense that is restored to her is smell:

> She smells the sycamores and poplar trees, resinous, acrid, she can smell the tiny shit of worms, she smells the polish on soldiers' boots, and roasted chestnuts, and bacon burning, she can smell the wisteria and heliotrope and lemon trees, she can smell the rank odor of deer and wild boar fleeing the royal hounds and the three thousand beaters in the King's employ, the effusions of a couple copulating in the nearby bushes, the sweet

> smell of the freshly cut lawn, the smoke from the chimneys of the palace, from far away the fat King on the privy, she can even smell the rain-lashed erosion of the marble of which she is made, the odor of death.

This is more smells than have ever been smelled by anyone, let alone a streak-haired habitué of the far climes of modernist cerebration. “I thought I was a ruminator,” Sontag said to me. “I thought I was a student. I thought I was a teacher. And then I discovered that I liked to tell stories and make people cry.”

Susan Rosenblatt was born in 1933 in New York City. Her mother remained in New York only briefly. Mildred and Jack Rosenblatt lived in China, in Tientsin, where Jack was a fur trader. Mildred soon returned to Tientsin, leaving Susan—and, later, her younger sister, Judith—in the care of an Irish-American nanny, Rosie. Rosie and the girls stayed with relatives. The parents came home for only a few months a year. Of her father Susan has a few “snapshot memories”: “I remember him folding what seemed to be an enormous handkerchief, the size of a tablecloth, and putting it in his breast pocket. I can remember looking up at this giant and thinking it was the most amazing thing in the world to be able to fold that handkerchief, and make it do all those things, and it ended up this little, small thing, and you stuck it in your pocket!” When she was five, her mother came back from China alone, saying that the father would be arriving soon. Four months passed; he didn’t come. “Then, one day, I was home from school on a lunch break, and my mother took me into the living room and said, ‘I have something to tell you.’ ” Her father had died of tuberculosis. Mildred, when she returned, had brought his body back with her. Given this information, Susan was sent back to school. Lunch break was over.

The family now moved repeatedly, first to New Jersey, then to Florida, then to Tucson, where they lived in a four-room bungalow on a dirt road. Mildred was gone much of the time. “I think she had boyfriends,” Sontag says. Then, when Susan was twelve, Mildred got married again, to Captain Nathan Sontag, an Army Air Corps pilot, and she asked the girls to take Captain Sontag’s name—which, Sontag says, she was perfectly willing to do. “I didn’t enjoy being called a dirty kike, and I had been.”

Sontag has described her childhood as “a long prison sentence.” She hated being a child, was embarrassed by it, and she has no memory of any of childhood’s fabled satisfactions. Her mother she recalls as “very laconic and very withholding.” (She was an alcoholic, as Susan found out many years later, from Judith.) Captain Sontag told Susan that if she didn’t stop reading books she would never get married. “I ground my teeth, I twirled my hair, I gnawed at my nails,” she later wrote. Then there is the other side of the story: those books, her discovery of art. In a stationery store in Tucson she had discovered the Modern Library series, and started reading the classics. Los Angeles—the family moved there when she was thirteen—had a thriving musical culture (Stravinsky and Schoenberg had settled there), and she found friends who drew her into it. At a magazine stand off Hollywood Boulevard she discovered *Partisan Review*. At home, she says, “nothing interesting was ever discussed. They were just talking drivel, all the time.” Likewise in her school, North Hollywood High: “I remember sophomore English. My teacher, she must have been on something. She used to take her shoes off under the desk, and she would knit. She had us write précis of articles in the *Reader’s Digest*.” But none of that mattered. Sontag lived in the fire in her brain. She read Kant, Nietzsche, Dostoyevsky, Kafka, Thomas Mann. When she read “The Magic Mountain,” she says, and got to the part where Hans Castorp and Clavdia Chauchat speak in French, she bought a French-English dictionary and looked up their conversation word by word. When she finished the novel, she refused to be parted from it. She went back to the beginning and reread it aloud, a chapter a night. Sports she hated. As for boyfriends, she had some, but aesthetic preoccupations seem to have been uppermost in her mind. In “Pilgrimage” she describes herself sitting in a car with her friend Merrill (a boy) on upper Mulholland Drive, a popular lovers’ lane. Amid the rocking chassis, she and Merrill “quizzed each other’s memory of Köchel listings. . . . We debated the merits of the Busch and the Budapest Quartets.” Then they went home.

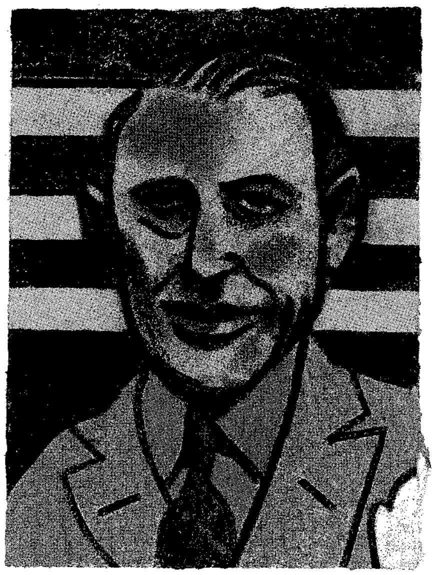
Sontag’s entry into adulthood was violently swift, as if she wanted to get the transition over with. At fifteen, she entered college; at seventeen, she married; at nineteen, she had a child. In her second year at the University of Chicago, she met a sociology instructor, Philip Rieff, ten years older than she, the future author of “Freud: The Mind of a Moralist” and “The Triumph of the Therapeutic.” “The day after I met him,” she recalls, “he asked me to marry him. I said, ‘You must be joking!’ He said, ‘No, no, I’m absolutely serious. When I saw you last night, a voice said to me, “That is the woman you’re going to marry.” ’ And I burst out laughing, because no one had ever called me a woman before. And, I don’t know what happened, I just said O.K.” A year and a half later, she gave birth to their son, David Rieff, who was to be another writer, the author, recently, of “Slaughterhouse,” on the war in Bosnia (a cause in which Sontag, too, has been very heavily involved). Rosie, who had stayed with Susan till she was fourteen, returned to look after David. “That’s one of the reasons David and I resemble each other so much,” Sontag says. “We had the same mother.” Then Philip took a job at Brandeis, and Susan started graduate school—first in English, then in philosophy—at Harvard.

“I really loved being a student,” Sontag says. “I was living in an intellectual delirium.” Her friends, and Philip’s, were mostly people in their sixties, “German refugee intellectuals, largely Jewish.” They talked about ideas. “Herbert Marcuse lived with Philip and me for a year, and we sat around endlessly discussing Hegel. David—he was maybe two—would come in and say, ‘Hegel, Hegel, Hegel.’ The culture I was involved in had absolutely no relation to anything contemporary. My idea of a thought about modernity was Nietzsche’s thinking about modernity.” Occasionally a gust of the now-and-happening blew past her face. “I remember once, I guess it was 1956. I used to go to my classes and go right home, because I had a child and a husband, and why wouldn’t I go home? But this day, for some reason—maybe I had had a fight with Philip—I didn’t go home. I went into the movie theatre in Harvard Square. The movie that was playing was 'Rock Around the Clock.' And I sat there, I was twenty-three years old, and I thought, My God! This is great! This is absolutely fantastic! After the movie I walked home very slowly. I thought, Do I tell Philip that I've seen this movie—this sort of musical about kids, and it was wonderful, and there were kids dancing in the aisles? And I thought, No, I can't tell him that."

She told him later, though. Or in any case she told him that she no longer wanted to be married. In 1957 she was given a one-year fellowship to Oxford, and she spent the spring of 1958 in Paris. Now, for the first time in years, she had the experience of being on her own. Sontag has recorded very mixed feelings about Philip Rieff. To me she said, "He was passionate, he was bookish, he was pure. He was very, very unworldly. *I* was worldly, compared to him." In her new novel, the very Sontag-like narrator describes her former husband as Mr. Casaubon, the dry, notecard-accumulating scholar of "Middlemarch," and herself as Dorothea, Casaubon's imprisoned wife. Sontag and Rieff had what she describes as a Siamese-twin marriage: "We were together twenty-four hours a day, practically. He waited for me outside my classes. He wanted me to come to his classes. He followed me to the bathroom. I followed him to the bathroom." Vaulting from her bookish youth into this bookish marriage, she had skipped adolescence, and adolescence now knocked on the door. She decided she wanted to forget Hegel and have fun. In 1959, after nine years of marriage, she divorced Rieff, packed up her child, and moved to New York.

"David grew up on coats," she says—the coats on the bed at parties. "I met Claes Oldenburg a couple of weeks after I came to New York. I started going to 'happenings,' and to these crazy movies that Jonas Mekas was putting on, and to Off Off Broadway plays, with all this Artaud. Artaud certainly came as a surprise to me! I learned to dance. I was practically thirty, and I learned to dance, and I became a dancing fool." New York wasn't all. In the early sixties she started spending her summers in Paris. "I went to the movies three times a day. I went to bars, I took drugs, I had a romance." In time she broadened her horizons. This

TAKES



RICHARD MERKIN

Most managers say "we" will lick So-and-So when they mean their man will try to, but Kearns does not allow his fighter even a share in the pronoun. He is a manager of the old school. His old-school tie, on the day I met him, was Columbia blue covered with sharps and flats in black, green, and cerise. The weaver of his shirt had imprisoned in it the texture as well as the color of pistachio ice cream. It was a wonder children hadn't eaten it off his back in the street, with the weather the way it was outside. He was wearing a pale-gray suit and skewbald shoes, and his eyes, of a confiding baby blue, were so bright that they seemed a part of the ensemble. He has a long, narrow, pink face that widens only at the cheekbones and at the mouth, which is fronted with wide, friendly-looking incisors, habitually exposed in an ingenuous smile. The big ears folded back against the sides of his head are not cauliflowered. They are evidence that in his boxing days he was never a catcher. Kearns is slim and active, and could pass for a spry fifty-five if the record books didn't show that he was knocked out by a welterweight champion named Honey Mellody in 1901, when he must have been at least full-grown.

In the course of his boxing career, which was not otherwise distinguished, Kearns had the fortune to meet the two fighters who in my opinion had the best ring names of all time—Honey Mellody and Mysterious Billy Smith. Smith was also a welterweight champion. "He was always doing something mysterious," Kearns says. "Like he would step on your foot, and when you looked down, he would bite you in the ear. If I had a fighter like that now, I could lick heavyweights. But we are living in a bad period all around. The writers are always crabbing about the fighters we got now, but look at the writers you got now themselves. All they think about is home to wife and children, instead of laying around saloons soaking up information."

—A. J. Liebling
"Kearns by a Knockout" (A Reporter at Large), July 12, 1952

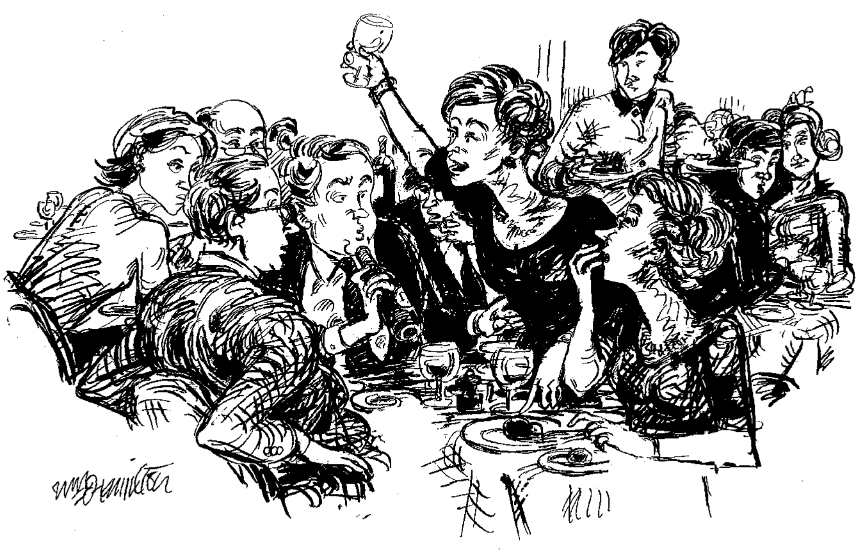
summer Norton will publish “Susan Sontag: The Making of an Icon,” by Carl Rollyson, an English professor at Baruch College, and Lisa Paddock. According to their agent, the book will address the “open secret” of Sontag’s “love of women,” together with “the strategies behind her meteoric rise to fame.” I don’t know about the strategies, but as for Sontag’s relationships with women, she says, “That I have had girlfriends as well as boyfriends is what? Is something I guess I never thought I was supposed to have to say, since it seems to me the most natural thing in the world.”

In those heady times in the sixties, she both lost her head and kept her head. Today, she stresses the latter. “It felt a little bit like slumming, like doing something that was good for me—to get to know what the world was about—but that obviously I was going to take back to whatever I thought my real life was. Everything I did was in the nature of ‘Well, I’ve done that, I wasn’t afraid of doing that.’ ” It was more, though. During her Paris summers she acquired a deeper knowledge of the work of Godard, Bresson, Genet, Lévi-Strauss, Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute—the people she would write about in “Against Interpretation.” In the ardor of those essays one can measure the intensity of her response to the “modern,” to what was, for her, the long-delayed release from classical culture. And in the coolness of the essays, in their rigor and idealism, one can read the truth that she was never wholly released, nor wanted to be. It was to these two poles—the sheer, visceral, get-me-out-of-this-graduate-school embrace of the new sensibility and the old, thoughtful, let’s-analyze-this-according-to-Hegel’s-three-categories-of-whatever—that the great trajectory of “Against Interpretation” was anchored.

And then there was politics. Like most young intellectuals in the sixties, Sontag was a leftist. She had no illusions about the Soviet Union, but she nourished hopes for the Communist regimes of Cuba and North Vietnam. She visited both countries and wrote about them with some reservation but considerable admiration. In a 1968 essay in *Esquire* she characterized Ho Chi Minh’s North Vietnam as “a deeply civil society which places great value on gentleness and the demands of the heart” and described how the government rehabilitated prostitutes by sending them to country retreats where people read them fairy tales and played games with them to restore their faith in humanity. As for Euro-America and its history of imperialism, “The white race *is* the cancer of human history,” she declared in 1966. “It is the white race and it alone . . . which eradicates autonomous civilizations wherever it spreads, which has upset the ecological balance of the planet, which now threatens the very existence of life itself.”

Those sentences came back to haunt Sontag as, in the course of the seventies, with the revelation of the abuses committed by the new Communist societies, she separated herself from the far left. In 1982, at a meeting at New York’s Town Hall to support Poland’s Solidarity movement, she gave an impromptu speech in which she said that Communism, all Communism, was fascism and that anyone who, in the preceding decades, had wanted to know what Communism was would have had a better chance of finding out the truth from the *Reader’s Digest* than from *The Nation*. That speech was met with fury both on the right—why had it taken her so long to wake up?—and, needless to say, on the left, where she was regarded as a deserter, and a comforter of the enemy. “I’m still digging my way out of the rubble,” she said in a 1984 interview.

Hopeful and energetic as always, she dug her way out. She moved from utopianism (“When you want to change everything, you’re forced to oppress”) to more modest commitments—Bosnia, human rights—and from a relativism that could forgive Communist regimes their little transitional problems to an absolutism requiring that all societies honor certain basic freedoms. She does not apologize for her change of heart. “If you ask me why didn’t I understand that any alternative to cutthroat capitalism and a society based on inequality and competitiveness not only wasn’t going to work but was going to turn into some horror, either of despotism or of economic catastrophe, all I can say is that lots of people didn’t understand this.” As for America, she seems to have made her peace with belonging to a privileged and bossy society—her point about Bosnia is that we should have intervened—and with the fact that she lives in a large penthouse in Chelsea, with excellent views, while others don’t. Western intellectuals, she told an interviewer in 1978, should “accept the fact that they’re part of the ruling class and use that as a basis for leading specific campaigns on real issues.”



“To Hillary—and politicians without borders!”

As her political hopes crumbled in the seventies, so did her hopes for the new art. In her early essays, Sontag was very much the Jacobin: a fiery reformer, laying down the law. Classical assumptions—that there was a reality we all agreed on, that language was adequate to describe it, that stories had a beginning, middle, and end—were classical, not modern. American art had to be brought up to date, converted to formalism, to style over content, and, prefer-ably, to a style that was transgressive or in some way distancing, to mark the distance between the modern mind and the world. But, Sontag says, "it never occurred to me that all the stuff I had cherished, and all the people I had cared about in my university education, could be dethroned. All that would happen is that you would set up an annex—you know, a playhouse—in which you could study these naughty new people, who challenged things. And you could have it all! Little did I know that the avant-garde transgressiveness of the sixties was to become absolutely institutionalized and that most of the gods of high culture would be dethroned and mocked." She is worried, of course, that she might be seen as having contributed to this. In a recent essay, "Thirty Years Later," which she wrote as the introduction to a new edition of "Against Interpretation," she says that, if so, she was misunderstood:

> To call for an "erotics of art" did not mean to disparage the role of the critical intellect. To laud work condescended to, then, as "popular" culture did not mean to conspire in the repudiation of high culture and its burden of seriousness, of depth. When I denounced . . . certain kinds of facile moralism, it was in the name of a more alert, less complacent seriousness. What I didn't understand . . . was that seriousness itself was in the early stages of losing credibility in the culture at large. . . . Now the very idea of the serious (and of the honorable) seems quaint, "unrealistic," to most people.

We have entered a period of barbarism, she says.

Those were the outer forces—political disappointments, artistic failures—that sapped Sontag's critical ambitions. But there were inner forces, too. The leading idea of "Against Interpretation" was its call for formalism, particularly in fiction, which to her at that time seemed America's most out-of-date art form. But, she now says, what appealed to her about formalism was mostly just the *idea* of it. As for its application to the novel, the very thing she stumped for, she didn't really like the models she held up: "I thought I *liked* William Burroughs and Nathalie Sarraute and Robbe-Grillet, but I didn't. I actually didn't." In "Against Interpretation" you can sense her reservations. The most energetic essays in that book are not on fiction but on film. (The piece on Bresson is still, thirty-six years later, the best essay on him—moving, deep, judicious.) And it is telling that the writers she focussed on in her later criticism were not—or not primarily—novelists but thinkers, essayists: Artaud, Canetti, Barthes, Benjamin. And she went on writing about filmmakers: Bergman, Godard, Leni Riefenstahl, Hans-Jürgen Syberberg.

Still, the idea of formalism haunted her. It seemed to her to represent, she says, "a certain fastidiousness." There was a lot of bad art around. Why was it so bad? Because, she told herself, it focussed on content, not form. Eventually, however, that explanation failed her. A crucial experience was her infatuation with dance, and particularly with New York City Ballet, beginning in the sixties. "I remember, when I started going to see Balanchine's work, I thought that what I loved in it was the austerity and the purity, the non-narrative quality. I loved 'Agon,' I loved 'The Four Temperaments.' Things such as 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' I merely tolerated. Also, I was very influenced by Lincoln Kirstein's writing on Balanchine's work, by his screwy Gurdjieffian take on it. Ballet, Balanchine—it was discipline, order, submission, formality. And I thought, Sure, that's what I love. But you know, that wasn't what I loved. I remember, in 'La Valse,' Joseph Duell putting his white-gloved hand in front of his face, and he did it in a certain way, and I used to feel *stabbed* through the heart. I would go and see 'La Valse' again and again, and I would wait for that moment. I would say to myself, 'Is it going to happen again?' And it did. And what is that about? I'm not sure, but it's not about formalism. Formalism, I think, was a good ploy, a strategy for stripping away a lot of things. But it certainly isn't an account of why these experiences are so transfiguring."

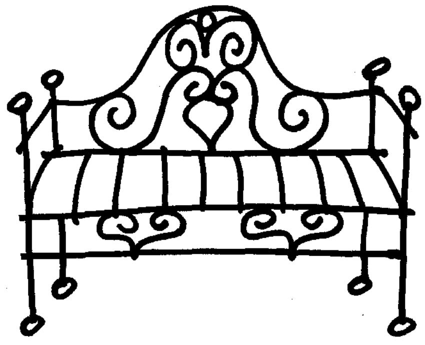
Balanchine was only part of a larger conversion. In the seventies and eighties, Sontag says, she discovered in herself a need for intensity, as opposed to the deep cool, the control, of formalism. She found it not just in dance but in opera and in other things that were, as she puts it, "sort of stand-and-deliver—you know, 'I love,' 'I hate,' 'I this,' 'I that.' " Her youth, she says, had been given over to a quest for the Truth. In an uncharacteristic psychoanalytic aside, she speculates that maybe this was the result of not knowing about her father's death, of finding out that she had been barred from the truth. But no, she says, her absolutism was part of her temperament, and was encouraged by her childhood reading. "I remember when I first read Kant—I was fourteen or something—it made perfect sense to me that your behavior should be something that could be a model for everyone else. You shouldn't do anything that wasn't right." Her early essays were written in that spirit. "I was involved in an immense self-mortification," she says. "Those essays aren't just austere"—I had remarked on their austerity—"they're positively ascetic, as if I didn't trust the sensuality of my imagination. I think I was afraid of getting lost. I just wanted to support things that were good, and that would be improving to people. I wanted to be useful and valuable, and that was natural to me, because I always had a moralistic frame of mind." Now, as the passage on the garden smells shows, she is more likely to trust the sensuality of her imagination, to glory in the world.

Such fevers are not new to her, however. If, now, her realism is powered by intensity, her didacticism was pretty intense, too, as is often the case with didacticism. Whatever the rigors of her film analyses, they were forged in passion. At the movies, she always had to sit in the third row, center. (She still does. I have been to the movies with her, and I have neck problems as a result.) "It was about having the image very, very large and overwhelming," she explains. "I wanted to be kidnapped." And when, following her formalist nose, she found something that seemed to her exciting, everyone she knew had to experience it, too. "The *things* she made us go to!" the poet Richard Howard, a longtime friend of hers, says. "That Syberberg person—'Our Hitler'? Seven hours! We call it 'Her Hitler.' " According to Howard, she always worked in a lather: "I remember her writing those essays through the night, and listening to 'Elektra,' very loud, with those women *screaming*. When she was completely wrung out, she'd take a nap on the floor by the typewriter. Two hours—then she was up and at it again." She often lost weight when she was writing. She couldn't eat.

Sontag is an enthusiast. A conversation with her is what a conversation with Rousseau must have been like. Her eyes flash. She waves her arms. She has a million ideas, and feels that all of them are right. She does not know how she seems. She tells you she doesn't like to talk about herself. (This after several hours of vivacious discussion of herself.) She says she loves to be corrected, and wonders why others don't. She is very forthcoming with information on what a precocious child she was. But this is all part of the thrilling adventure that for sixty-seven years has been going on in her brain, and she is not about to suppress details. Also, she is still a Kantian, still trying to be a model, and seeking models. Whatever essays she now writes are mostly homages, as were her earlier essays, and the qualities she praises in her subjects are often her own qualities, or ones she aspires to. In her piece on Canetti, she speaks of his tendency to write homages: "So wholehearted is Canetti's relation to the duty and pleasure of admiring others, so fastidious is his sense of the writer's vocation, that humility—and pride—make him extremely self-involved in a characteristically impersonal way. He is preoccupied with being someone *he* can admire." This is a good description of Sontag.

When she isn't reminding me of Rousseau, she reminds me of Buster Keaton. There they both go, eyes straight ahead, utterly intent on what they're trying to do—get the girl, understand Communism—and oblivious of the felled houses, the outraged constables that they leave in their wake. Sontag has a superlatively strong ego. She rarely responds to criticism. (Actually, she's one of those writers who say they don't read reviews: "I get my son to read them for me and just tell me thumbs up or thumbs down.") She is undiscourageable. Who else, upon receiving a diagnosis of cancer, would sit down and write a book on the history of attitudes to cancer, the wrongness of any attitude that tends to stigmatize the patient, the rightness of going out and getting proper medical care? She cheered herself up, and helped others, and, not incidentally, survived, just as Keaton usually got the girl.

Now she has taken the energy of mind that she once brought to ideas and applied it to fiction, to the world. If Tolstoy, as Isaiah Berlin said, went from fox to hedgehog, she is trying to do the reverse, and loving every minute of it. "In America," like "The Volcano Lover," is a historical novel. It tells the story of Maryna Zalezowska, loosely based on Helena Modjeska, the famous Polish actress who emigrated to the United States with an entourage of friends in 1876. This choice of subject left Sontag with a lot of homework to do, on life in the eighteen-seventies in Kraków, New York, San Francisco, indeed Anaheim, where Modjeska and her companions tried to set up a utopian farming community. Sontag threw herself into the work. She read nineteenth-century agricultural manuals, old Baedekers, crumbling newspapers, anything she could lay her hands on. When Maryna's friend Ryzsard, a novelist—he is based on Henryk Sienkiewicz, the author of "Quo Vadis"—makes the journey first, on the Germanic, the ship is described in close detail. ("I have a floor plan of that ship," Sontag says. "I know *everything* about it. I know that the room where they smoked was the Smoke-Room, with a capital 'S' and a capital 'R' and a hyphen in between, and not the *fumoir*, as it was later called.") When Ryzsard arrives in New York, we learn how Central Park, which opened in 1859, looked in 1876. ("Most of the trees are too young yet to give any shade," Ryzsard complains.) When Maryna lands in America, she goes to the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia and tells us everything that was there: a replica of George Washington's tomb, a huge statue of Iolanthe carved in butter, and also "this instrument for hearing at great distances, the telephone." When she gets to San Francisco, we find out about the Chinese theatre ("The sun emerges, followed by a dragon, the dragon tries to swallow the sun, the sun resists") and about how many pickpockets there were in the audience.



The world! Sontag loves it! She casts her mind back to the time when she was describing Maryna's first extended stay in San Francisco. She put her in the Palace Hotel—it was the most sumptuous hotel—and she pictured her going up in the elevator. "But then I had to find out if the hotel *had* elevators, because the Otis elevator had just been introduced in 1876." Then she found a contemporary description of the hotel, and it turned out that the Palace didn't just have elevators—they were mirrored. "I said 'Oh my God!' I was happy for a whole day, just seeing mirrored elevators. It's like you were *manufacturing* reality, but the reality was—*real*. You were responsible to what was actually there. You weren't—I don't know—it felt like an act of benevolence to actually, truthfully, describe, in a way that would be delicious to experience, how things were." She quickly adds that none of the description is gratuitous. "I want these things constantly to be transfigured by someone's attention, by what it *means* to them." To Maryna, an actress, very aware of herself and of the impression she is making, a mirrored elevator would have a special significance: she can see herself, and see others looking at her. So the mirror develops character. "It's not just a detail," Sontag says. Still, one feels, somehow, that the mirror is above all a detail, a piece of reality, and for Sontag a precious one, because it multiplies reality, gives back to us the women's gowns, the men's beaver hats, the whole shining world.

Not surprisingly, Sontag finds fiction easier to produce than essays. She has always been a nervous writer. "Each time I write," she says, "it's like jumping into an icy lake." The essays might go through ten or fifteen drafts: "I'd say to myself, 'Is this true?' And then I'd say, 'No, it isn't true,' and I'd tear it up and start over." But the fiction comes much faster. "On Photography," less than two hundred pages long, took her nearly five years. "The Volcano Lover," maybe three times as long, took two and a half years. In fiction, she says, about eighty per cent of it is there in the first draft.

But, whatever Sontag's new embrace

LOURDES: THE COSMETIC SURGERY CHAPEL
Holy Spirit, everything is sagging! I BESEECH THEE!
My hairline and I come to you, O Divine One, in OUR TIME OF NEED!
Help me find the way to a more attractive profile and I will be THY ETERNAL SERVANT!
R. Chast

of reality, the person who wrote the essays is still in attendance, with the result that the realism of "In America" is overlaid with plenty of formalism. The narrative technique changes from chapter to chapter. At one point, we are getting the story from a diary kept by Maryna's husband, Bogdan; at another, from Maryna's letters; at another, when Maryna returns home on a visit, from a marathon quote (no paragraph break for eleven pages!) of her conversations with her family and friends. The book ends, like "The Volcano Lover," with a long, passionate monologue, a stand-and-deliver—and by a person who, till then, had appeared only fleetingly, Maryna's fellow-actor Edwin Booth. But that's nothing. The book begins with the narrator, who Sontag says is a fictional creation, not Sontag—though, curiously, she seems to have married Philip Rieff, or someone very like him, and worked in war relief in Sarajevo in the nineteen-nineties—crashing a dinner party given for Maryna in Kraków in 1875. And as in "The Volcano Lover," the narrator repeatedly breaks into the novel, giving us her thoughts on this and that, telling us that she, like Maryna, is of Polish ancestry (Sontag's forebears emigrated to the United States from Poland) and that she, like Ryzsard, is a novelist, taking real-life events and turning them into a story.

So "In America" is endlessly self-aware. It is Sontag speaking, as she spoke to us all those years in the essays. Hence the book's tone, bright, silvery, bracing—tinkling at times. We do not lose ourselves in Maryna; we hover a little above her. As a result, some people will say, as they said of "The Volcano Lover," that Sontag is not really a novelist, that she is still an essayist. But what is wonderful about the book is exactly this counterpoint of novelist and essayist, of innocence and knowingness. From the knowingness comes another excellence of "In America," its cat's cradle of meanings. Of the novel's main themes, one, as the title tells us, is crucial: America, something that Sontag has been writing about for a long time. Bogdan, the most thoughtful character in the book, admires the Americans' hopefulness and confidence at the same time that he is bewildered by their lack of any tragic sense. "I am bred to a distinctively Polish appreciation of the nobility of failure," he writes in his diary. Americans don't know about this, he reasons, because they don't know about history. Maryna ponders the same thing: "Absences: plush, relics, dimness, corridors, one's own history." In this country, she says, there is no nostalgia. The decline of that illness, a doctor friend of hers predicts, will give rise to a new one, "the inability to become attached to anything."

Interestingly, however, it is Maryna, so thoroughly Old World, who turns out to be the perfect anti-sentimentalist, eager for success and a new life. Bogdan does O.K., too. He ends up not just with Maryna but with someone named Juan María as well. So the Europeans become very good Americans. And at the end of the novel it is Booth, the American—drunk, bloody-minded, haunted by his brother's murder of Lincoln—who makes the case for tragedy, and tells Maryna how shallow she is.

Nor is the one position seen as bad and the other good. Again Sontag is saying, "This, yes. But also that." And she says it the more firmly since the conflict in question subsumes the points she herself has been travelling between: content versus form, enjoyment versus "Kantianism." In the book, that personal drama becomes a universal one. Yes, we all want to be deep. We want history—plush, relics. But we also want a little hope, and a good time, and a few more years. We honor the tragic sense of life, but we'd just as soon not be tragic ourselves. The world calls us, the more so as we are reminded that we will have to leave it some day. Sontag knows she's sixty-seven, but she says she feels no different from the way she felt at thirty, and she thinks her best writing is ahead of her. She's already planning her next novel: "It's going to be set in Japan, in the present. I want to do a novel in the present. And it's going to be short. A hundred and twenty pages, I figure. Have you been to Japan? No? I've been there maybe twelve times. Fascinating place." The eyes widen, the arms wave, and she starts to tell me about it. ♦

FICTION

THE LOVE OF MY LIFE

BY T. CORAGHESSAN BOYLE

REUBEN COX, "SUMMER, 1998"

They wore each other like a pair of socks. He was at her house, she was at his. Everywhere they went—to the mall, to the game, to movies and shops and the classes that structured their days like a new kind of chronology—their fingers were entwined, their shoulders touching, their hips joined in the slow triumphant sashay of love. He drove her car, slept on the couch in the family room at her parents' house, played tennis and watched football with her father on the big, thirty-six-inch TV in the kitchen. She went shopping with his mother and hers, a triumvirate of tastes, and she would have played tennis with his father, if it came to it, but his father was dead. "I love you," he told her, because he did, because there was no feeling like this, no triumph, no high—it was like being immortal and unconquerable, like floating. And a hundred times a day she said it, too: "I love you. I love you."

They were together at his house one night when the rain froze on the streets and sheathed the trees in glass. It was her idea to take a walk and feel it in their hair and on the glistening shoulders of their parkas, an otherworldly drumming of pellets flung down out of the troposphere, alien and familiar at the same time, and they glided the length of the front walk and watched the way the power lines bellied and swayed. He built a fire when they got back, while she towelled her hair and made hot chocolate laced with Jack Daniel's. They'd rented a pair of slasher movies for the ritualized comfort of them—"Teens have sex," he said, "and then they pay for it in body parts"—and the maniac had just climbed out of the heating vent, with a meat hook dangling from the recesses of his empty sleeve, when the phone rang.

It was his mother, calling from the hotel room in Boston where she was curled up—shacked up?—for the weekend with the man she'd been dating. He tried to picture her, but he couldn't. He even closed his eyes a minute, to concentrate, but there was nothing there. Was everything all right? she wanted to know. With the storm and all? No, it hadn't hit Boston yet, but she saw on the Weather Channel that it was on its way. Two seconds after he hung up—before she could even hit the Start button on the VCR—the phone rang again, and this time it was her mother. Her mother had been drinking. She was calling from a restaurant, and China could hear a clamor of voices in the background. "Just stay put," her mother shouted into the phone. "The streets are like a skating rink. Don't you even think of getting in that car."

Well, she wasn't thinking of it. She was thinking of having Jeremy to herself, all night, in the big bed in his mother's room. They'd been having sex ever since they started going together at the end of their junior year, but it was always sex in the car or sex on a blanket or the lawn, hurried sex, nothing like she wanted it to be. She kept thinking of the way it was in the movies, where the stars ambushed each other on beds the size of small planets and then did it again and again until they lay nestled in a heap of pillows and blankets, her head on his chest, his arm flung over her shoulder, the music fading away to individual notes plucked softly on a guitar and everything in the frame glowing as if it had been sprayed with liquid gold. That was how it was supposed to be. That was how it was going to be. At least for tonight.

She'd been wandering around the kitchen as she talked, dancing with the phone in an idle slow saraband, watching the frost sketch a design on the window over the sink, no sound but the soft hiss of the ice pellets on the roof, and now she pulled open the freezer door and extracted a pint box of ice cream. She was in her socks, socks so thick they were like slippers, and a pair of black leggings under an oversize sweater. Beneath her feet, the polished floorboards were as slick as the sidewalk outside, and she liked the feel of that, skating indoors in her big socks. "Uh-huh," she said into the phone. "Uh-huh. Yeah, we're watching a movie." She dug a finger into the ice cream and stuck it in her mouth.

"Come on," Jeremy called from the living room, where the maniac rippled menacingly over the Pause button. "You're going to miss the best part."

"O.K., Mom, O.K.," she said into the phone, parting words, and then she hung up. "You want ice cream?" she called, licking her finger.

Jeremy's voice came back at her, a voice in the middle range, with a congenital scratch in it, the voice of a nice guy, a very nice guy who could be the star of a TV show about nice guys: "What kind?" He had a pair of shoulders and pumped-up biceps, too, a smile that jumped from his lips to his eyes, and close-cropped hair that stood up straight off the crown of his head. And he was always singing—she loved that—his voice so true he could do any song, and there was no lyric he didn't know, even on the oldies station. She scooped ice cream and saw him in a scene from last summer, one hand draped casually over the wheel of his car, the radio throbbing, his voice raised in perfect synch with Billy Corgan's, and the night standing still at the end of a long dark street overhung with maples.

"Chocolate. Swiss-chocolate almond."

"O.K.," he said, and then he was wondering if there was any whipped cream, or maybe hot fudge—he was sure his mother had a jar stashed away somewhere, *Look behind the mayonnaise on the top row*—and when she turned around he was standing in the doorway.

She kissed him—they kissed whenever they met, no matter where or when, even if one of them had just stepped out of the room, because that was love, that was the way love was—and then they took two bowls of ice cream into the living room and, with a flick of the remote, set the maniac back in motion.

It was an early spring that year, the world gone green overnight, the thermometer twice hitting the low eighties in the first week of March. Teachers were holding sessions outside. The whole school, even the halls and the cafeteria, smelled of fresh-mowed grass and the unfolding blossoms of the fruit trees in the development across the street, and students—especially seniors—were cutting class to go out to the quarry or the reservoir or to just drive the backstreets with the sunroof and the windows open wide. But not China. She was hitting the books, studying late, putting everything in its place like pegs in a board, even love, even that. Jeremy didn't get it. "Look, you've already been accepted at your first-choice school, you're going to wind up in the top ten G.P.A.-wise, and you've got four years of tests and term papers ahead of you, and grad school after that. You'll only be a high-school senior once in your life. Relax. Enjoy it. Or at least *experience* it."

He'd been accepted at Brown, his father's alma mater, and his own G.P.A. would put him in the top ten per cent of their graduating class, and he was content with that, skating through his final semester, no math, no science, taking art and music, the things he'd always wanted to take but never had time for—and Lit., of course, A.P. History, and Spanish 5. "*Tú eres el amor de mi vida*," he would tell her when they met at her locker or at lunch or when he picked her up for a movie on Saturday nights.

"*Y tú también*," she would say, "or is it '*yo también*'?"—French was her language. "But I keep telling you it really matters to me, because I know I'll never catch Margery Yu or Christian Davenport, I mean they're a lock for val and salut, but it'll kill me if people like Kerry Sharp or Jalapy Seegrand finish ahead of me—you should know that, you of all people—"

It amazed him that she actually brought her books along when they went backpacking over spring break. They'd planned the trip all winter and through the long wind tunnel that was February, packing away freeze-dried entrées, PowerBars, Gore-Tex windbreakers, and matching sweatshirts, weighing each item on a handheld scale with a dangling hook at the bottom of it. They were going up into the Catskills, to a lake he'd found on a map, and they were going to be together, without interruption, without telephones, automobiles, parents, teachers, friends, relatives, and pets, for five full days. They were going to cook over an open fire, they were going to read to each other and burrow into the double sleeping bag with the connubial zipper up the seam he'd found in his mother's closet, a relic of her own time in the lap of nature. It smelled of her, of his mother, a vague scent of her perfume that had lingered there dormant all these years, and maybe there was the faintest whiff of his father, too, though his father had been gone so long he didn't even remember what he looked like, let alone what he might have smelled like. Five days. And it wasn't going to rain, not a drop. He didn't even bring his fishing rod, and that was love.

When the last bell rang down the curtain on Honors Math, Jeremy was waiting at the curb in his mother's Volvo station wagon, grinning up at China through the windshield while the rest of the school swept past with no thought for anything but release. There were shouts and curses, T-shirts in motion, slashing legs, horns bleating from the seniors' lot, the school buses lined up like armored vehicles awaiting the invasion—chaos, sweet chaos—and she stood there a moment to savor it. "Your mother's car?" she said, slipping in beside him and laying both arms over his shoulders to pull him to her for a kiss. He'd brought her jeans and hiking boots along, and she was going to change as they drove, no need to go home, no more circumvention and delay, a stop at McDonald's, maybe, or Burger King, and then it was the sun and the wind and the moon and the stars. Five days. Five whole days.

"Yeah," he said, in answer to her question, "my mother said she didn't want to have to worry about us breaking down in the middle of nowhere—"

"So she's got your car? She's going to sell real estate in your car?"

He just shrugged and smiled. "Free at last," he said, pitching his voice down low till it was exactly like Martin Luther King's. "Thank God Almighty, we are free at last."

It was dark by the time they got to the trailhead, and they wound up camping just off the road in a rocky tumble of brush, no place on earth less likely or less comfortable, but they were together, and they held each other through the damp whispering hours of the night and hardly slept at all. They made the lake by noon the next day, the trees just coming into leaf, the air sweet with the smell of the sun in the pines. She insisted on setting up the tent, just in case—it could rain, you never knew—but all he wanted to do was stretch out on a gray neoprene pad and feel the sun on his face. Eventually, they both fell asleep in the sun, and when they woke they made love right there, beneath the trees, and with the wide blue expanse of the lake giving back the blue of the sky. For dinner, it was étouffée and rice, out of the foil pouch, washed down with hot chocolate and a few squirts of red wine from Jeremy's bota bag.

The next day, the whole day through, they didn't bother with clothes at all. They couldn't swim, of course—the lake was too cold for that—but they could bask and explore and feel the breeze out of the south on their bare legs and the places where no breeze had touched before. She would remember that always, the feel of that, the intensity of her emotions, the simple unrefined pleasure of living in the moment. Wood smoke. Duelling flashlights in the night. The look on Jeremy's face when he presented her with the bag of finger-size crayfish he'd spent all morning collecting.

What else? The rain, of course. It came midway through the third day, clouds the color of iron filings, the lake hammered to iron, too, and the storm that crashed through the trees and beat at their tent with a thousand angry fists. They huddled in the sleeping bag, sharing the wine and a bag of trail mix, reading to each other from a book of Donne's love poems (she was writing a paper for Mrs. Masterson called "Ocular Imagery in the Poetry of John Donne") and the last third of a vampire novel that weighed eighteen-point-one ounces.

And the sex. They were careful, always careful—*I will never, never be like those breeders that bring their puffed-up squalling little red-faced babies to class*, she told him, and he agreed, got adamant about it, even, until it became a running theme in their relationship, the breeders overpopulating an overpopulated world and ruining their own lives in the process—but she had forgotten to pack her pills and he had only two condoms with him, and it wasn't as if there were a drugstore around the corner.

In the fall—or the end of August, actually—they packed their cars separately and left for college, he to Providence and she to Binghamton. They were separated by three hundred miles, but there was the telephone, there was E-mail, and for the first month or so there were Saturday nights in a motel in Danbury, but that was a haul, it really was, and they both agreed that they should focus on their

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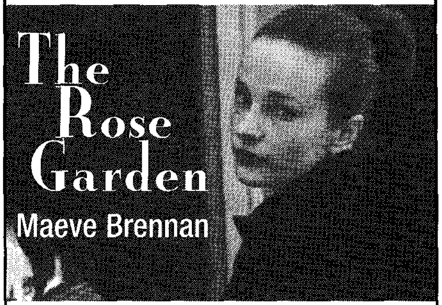

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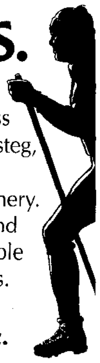

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course work and cut back to every second or maybe third week. On the day they'd left—and no, she didn't want her parents driving her up there, she was an adult and she could take care of herself—Jeremy followed her as far as the Bear Mountain Bridge and they pulled off the road and held each other till the sun fell down into the trees. She had a poem for him, a Donne poem, the saddest thing he'd ever heard. It was something about the moon. *More than moon*, that was it, lovers parting and their tears swelling like an ocean till the girl—the woman, the female—had more power to raise the tides than the moon itself, or some such. More than moon. That's what he called her after that, because she was white and round and getting rounder, and it was no joke, and it was no term of endearment.

She was pregnant. Pregnant, they figured, since the camping trip, and it was their secret, a new constant in their lives, a fact, an inescapable fact that never varied no matter how many home-pregnancy kits they went through. Baggy clothes, that was the key, all in black, cargo pants, flowing dresses, a jacket even in summer. They went to a store in the city where nobody knew them and she got a girdle, and then she went away to school in Binghamton and he went to Providence. "You've got to get rid of it," he told her in the motel room that had become a prison. "Go to a clinic," he told her for the hundredth time, and outside it was raining—or, no, it was clear and cold that night, a foretaste of winter. "I'll find the money—you know I will."

She wouldn't respond. Wouldn't even look at him. One of the "Star Wars" movies was on TV, great flat thundering planes of metal roaring across the screen, and she was just sitting there on the edge of the bed, her shoulders hunched and hair hanging limp. Someone slammed a car door—two doors in rapid succession—and a child's voice shouted, "Me! Me first!"

"China," he said. "Are you listening to me?"

"I can't," she murmured, and she was talking to her lap, to the bed, to the floor. "I'm scared. I'm so scared." There were footsteps in the room next door, ponderous and heavy, then the quick tattoo of the child's feet and a sudden thump against the wall. "I don't want anyone to know," she said.

He could have held her, could have squeezed in beside her and wrapped her in his arms, but something flared in him. He couldn't understand it. He just couldn't. "What are you thinking? Nobody'll know. He's a doctor, for Christ's sake, sworn to secrecy, the doctor-patient compact and all that. What are you going to do, keep it? Huh? Just show up for English 101 with a baby on your lap and say, 'Hi, I'm the Virgin Mary'?"

She was crying. He could see it in the way her shoulders suddenly crumpled and now he could hear it, too, a soft nasal complaint that went right through him. She lifted her face to him and held out her arms and he was there beside her, rocking her back and forth in his arms. He could feel the heat of her face against the hard fibre of his chest, a wetness there, fluids, her fluids. "I don't want a doctor," she said.

And that colored everything, that simple negative: life in the dorms, roommates, bars, bullshit sessions, the smell of burning leaves and the way the light fell across campus in great wide smoking bands just before dinner, the unofficial skateboard club, films, lectures, pep rallies, football—none of it mattered. He couldn't have a life. Couldn't be a freshman. Couldn't wake up in the morning and tumble into the slow steady current of the world. All he could think of was her. Or not simply her—her and him, and what had come between them. Because they argued now, they wrangled and fought and debated, and it was no pleasure to see her in that motel room with the queen-size bed and the big color TV and the soaps and shampoos they made off with as if they were treasure. She was pigheaded, stubborn, irrational. She was spoiled, he could see that now, spoiled by her parents and their standard of living and the socioeconomic expectations of her class—of his class—and the promise of life as you like it, an unscrolling vista of pleasure and acquisition. He loved her. He didn't want to turn his back on her. He would be there for her no matter what, but why did she have to be so *stupid*?

Big sweats, huge sweats, sweats that drowned and engulfed her, that was her campus life, sweats and the dining hall. Her dorm mates didn't know her,

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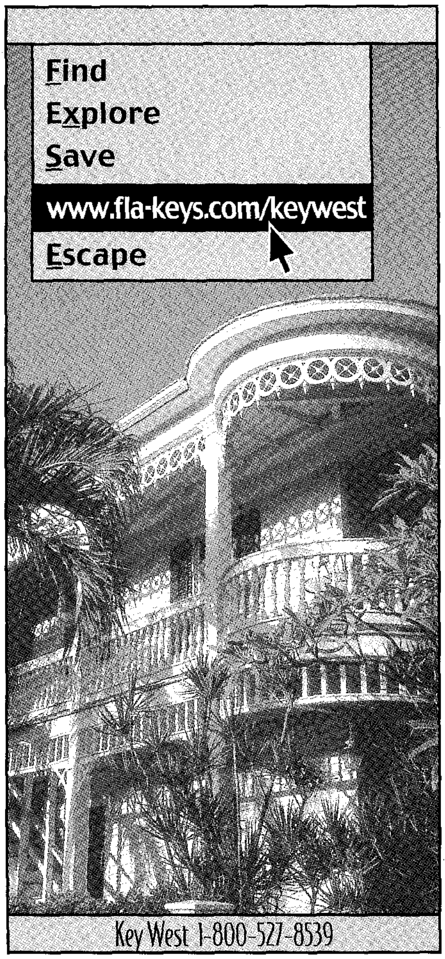

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and so what if she was putting on weight? Everybody did. How could you shovel down all those carbohydrates, all that sugar and grease and the puddings and nachos and all the rest, without putting on ten or fifteen pounds the first semester alone? Half the girls in the dorm were waddling around like the Doughboy, their faces bloated and blotched with acne, with crusting pimples and whiteheads fed on fat. So she was putting on weight. Big deal. "There's more of me to love," she told her roommate, "and Jeremy likes it that way. And, really, he's the only one that matters." She was careful to shower alone, in the early morning, long before the light had begun to bump up against the windows.

On the night her water broke—it was mid-December, almost nine months, as best as she could figure—it was raining. Raining hard. All week she'd been having tense rasping sotto-voce debates with Jeremy on the phone—arguments, fights—and she told him that she would die, creep out into the woods like some animal and bleed to death, before she'd go to a hospital. "And what am I supposed to do?" he demanded in a high childish whine, as if he were the one who'd been knocked up, and she didn't want to hear it, she didn't.

"Do you love me?" she whispered. There was a long hesitation, a pause you could have poured all the affirmation of the world into.

"Yes," he said finally, his voice so soft and reluctant it was like the last gasp of a dying old man.

"Then you're going to have to rent the motel."

"And then what?"

"Then—I don't know." The door was open, her roommate framed there in the hall, a burst of rock and roll coming at her like an assault. "I guess you'll have to get a book or something."

By eight, the rain had turned to ice and every branch of every tree was coated with it, the highway littered with glistening black sticks, no moon, no stars, the tires sliding out from under her, and she felt heavy, big as a sumo wrestler, heavy and loose at the same time. She'd taken a towel from the dorm and put it under her, on the seat, but it was a mess, everything was a mess. She was cramping. Fidgeting with her hair. She tried the radio, but it was no help, nothing but songs she hated, singers that were worse. Twenty-two miles to Danbury and the first of the contractions came like a seizure, like a knife blade thrust into her spine. Her world narrowed to what the headlights would show her.

Jeremy was waiting for her at the door to the room, the light behind him a pale rinse of nothing, no smile on his face, no human expression at all. They didn't kiss—they didn't even touch—and then she was on the bed, on her back, her face clenched like a fist. She heard the rattle of the sleet at the window, the murmur of the TV: *I can't let you go like this*, a man protested, and she could picture him, angular and tall, a man in a hat and overcoat in a black-and-white world that might have been another planet, *I just can't*. "Are you—?" Jeremy's voice drifted into the mix, and then stalled. "Are you ready? I mean, is it time? Is it coming now?"

She said one thing then, one thing only, her voice as pinched and hollow as the sound of the wind in the gutters: "Get it out of me."

It took a moment, and then she could feel his hands fumbling with her sweats.

Later, hours later, when nothing had happened but pain, a parade of pain with drum majors and brass bands and penitents crawling on their hands and knees till the streets were stained with their blood, she cried out and cried out again. "It's like 'Alien,' " she gasped, "like that thing in 'Alien' when it, it—"

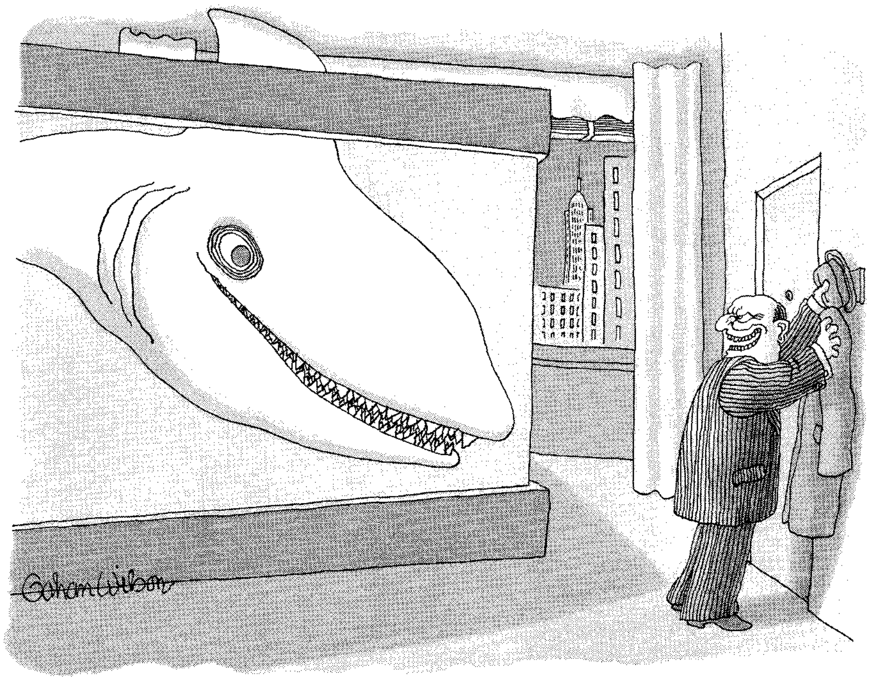
"It's O.K.," he kept telling her, "it's O.K.," but his face betrayed him. He looked scared, looked as if he'd been drained of blood in some evil experiment in yet another movie, and a part of her wanted to be sorry for him, but another part, the part that was so commanding and fierce it overrode everything else, couldn't begin to be.

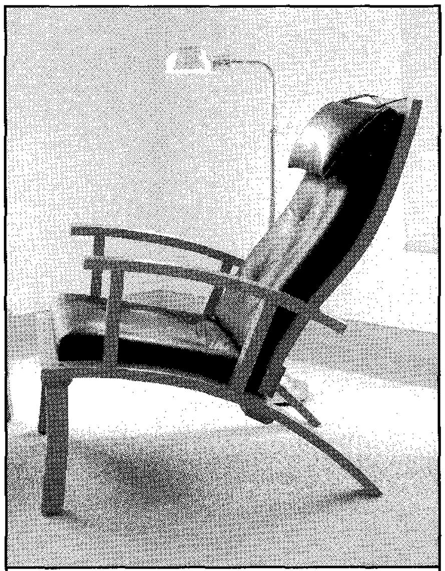
He was useless, and he knew it. He'd never been so purely sick at heart and terrified in all his life, but he tried to be there for her, tried to do his best, and when the baby came out, the baby girl all slick with blood and mucus and the lumped white stuff that was like something spilled at the bottom of a garbage can, he was thinking of the ninth grade and how close he'd come to fainting while the teacher went around the room to prick their fingers one by one so they each could smear a drop of blood across a slide. He didn't faint now. But he was close to it, so close he could feel the room dodging away under his feet. And then her voice, the first intelligible thing she'd said in an hour: "Get rid of it. Just get rid of it."

Of the drive back to Binghamton he remembered nothing. Or practically nothing. They took towels from the motel and spread them across the seat of her car, he could remember that much . . . and the blood, how could he forget the blood? It soaked through her sweats and the towels and even the thick cotton bathmat and into the worn fabric of the seat itself. And it all came from inside her, all of it, tissue and mucus and the shining bright fluid, no end to it, as if she'd been turned inside out. He wanted to ask her about that, if that was normal, but she was asleep the minute she slid out from under his arm and dropped into the seat. If he focussed, if he really concentrated, he could remember the way her head lolled against the doorframe while the engine whined and the car rocked and the slush threw a dark blanket over the windshield every time a truck shot past in the opposite direction. That and the exhaustion. He'd never been so tired, his head on a string, shoulders slumped, his arms like two pillars of concrete. And what if he'd nodded off? What if he'd gone into a skid and hurtled over an embankment into the filthy gray accumulation of the worst day of his life? What then?

She made it into the dorm under her own power, nobody even looked at her, and, no, she didn't need his help. "Call me," she whispered, and they kissed, her lips so cold it was like kissing a steak through the plastic wrap, and then he parked her car in the student lot and walked to the bus station. He made Danbury late that night, caught a ride out to the motel, and walked right through the "Do Not Disturb" sign on the door. Fifteen minutes. That was all it took. He bundled up everything, every trace, left the key in the box at the desk, and stood scraping the ice off the windshield of his car while the night opened up above him to a black glitter of sky. He never gave a thought to what lay discarded in the Dumpster out back, itself wrapped in plastic, so much meat, so much cold meat.

He was at the very pinnacle of his dream, the river dressed in its currents, the deep hole under the cutbank, and the fish like silver bullets swarming to his bait, when they woke


"Hi there, big guy!"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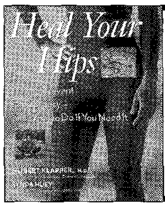

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him—when Rob woke him, Rob Greiner, his roommate, Rob with a face of crumbling stone and two policemen there at the door behind him and the roar of the dorm falling away to a whisper. And that was strange, policemen, a real anomaly in that setting, and at first—for the first thirty seconds, at least—he had no idea what they were doing there. Parking tickets? Could that be it? But then they asked him his name, just to confirm it, joined his hands together behind his back, and fitted two loops of naked metal over his wrists, and he began to understand. He saw McCaffrey and Tuttle from across the hall staring at him as if he were Jeffrey Dahmer or something, and the rest of them, all the rest, every head poking out of every door up and down the corridor, as the police led him away.

“What’s this all about?” he kept saying, the cruiser nosing through the dark streets to the station house, the man at the wheel and the man beside him as incapable of speech as the seats or the wire mesh or the gleaming black dashboard that dragged them forward into the night. And then it was up the steps and into an explosion of light, more men in uniform, stand here, give me your hand, now the other one, and then the cage and the questions. Only then did he think of that thing in the garbage sack and the sound it had made—its body had made—when he flung it into the Dumpster like a sack of flour and the lid slammed down on it. He stared at the walls, and this was a movie, too. He’d never been in trouble before, never been inside a police station, but he knew his role well enough, because he’d seen it played out a thousand times on the tube: deny everything. Even as the two detectives settled in across from him at the bare wooden table in the little box of the overlit room he was telling himself just that: *Deny it, deny it all.*

The first detective leaned forward and set his hands on the table as if he’d come for a manicure. He was in his thirties, or maybe his forties, a tired-looking man with the scars of the turmoil he’d witnessed gouged into the flesh under his eyes. He didn’t offer a cigarette (“I don’t smoke,” Jeremy was prepared to say, giving them that much at least), and he didn’t smile or soften his eyes. And when he spoke his voice carried no freight at all, not outrage or threat or cajolery—it was just a voice, flat and tired. “Do you know a China Berkowitz?” he said.

And she. She was in the community hospital, where the ambulance had deposited her after her roommate had called 911 in a voice that was like a bone stuck in the back of her throat, and it was raining again. Her parents were there, her mother red-eyed and sniffling, her father looking like an actor who has forgotten his lines, and there was another woman there, too, a policewoman. The policewoman sat in an orange plastic chair in the corner, dipping her head to the knitting in her lap. At first, China’s mother had tried to be pleasant to the woman, but pleasant wasn’t what the circumstances called for, and now she ignored her, because the very unpleasant fact was that China was being taken into custody as soon as she was released from the hospital.

For a long while no one said anything—everything had already been said, over and over, one long flood of hurt and recrimination—and the antiseptic silence of the hospital held them in its grip while the rain beat at the windows and the machines at the foot of the bed counted off numbers. From down the hall came a snatch of TV dialogue, and for a minute China opened her eyes and thought she was back in the dorm. “Honey,” her mother said, raising a purgatorial face to her, “are you all right? Can I get you anything?”

“I need to—I think I need to pee.”

“Why?” her father demanded, and it was the perfect non sequitur. He was up out of the chair, standing over her, his eyes like cracked porcelain. “Why didn’t you tell us, or at least tell your mother—or Dr. Fredman? Dr. Fredman, at least. He’s been—he’s like a family member, you know that, and he could have, or he would have . . . What were you *thinking*, for Christ’s sake?”

Thinking? She wasn’t thinking anything, not then and not now. All she wanted—and she didn’t care what they did to her, beat her, torture her, drag her weeping through the streets in a dirty white dress with “Baby Killer” stitched over her breast in scarlet letters—was to see Jeremy. Just that. Because what really mattered was what he was thinking.

The food at the Sarah Barnes Cooper Women's Correctional Institute was exactly what they served at the dining hall in college, heavy on the sugars, starches, and bad cholesterol, and that would have struck her as ironic if she'd been there under other circumstances—doing community outreach, say, or researching a paper for sociology class. But given the fact that she'd been locked up for more than a month now, the object of the other girls' threats, scorn, and just plain *nastiness*, given the fact that her life was ruined beyond any hope of redemption, and every newspaper in the country had her shrunken white face plastered across its front page under a headline that screamed "MOTEL MOM," she didn't have much use for irony. She was scared twenty-four hours a day. Scared of the present, scared of the future, scared of the reporters waiting for the judge to set bail so that they could swarm all over her the minute she stepped out the door. She couldn't concentrate on the books and magazines her mother brought her, or even on the TV in the rec room. She sat in her room—it was a room, just like a dorm room, except that they locked you in at night—and stared at the walls, eating peanuts, M&M's, sunflower seeds by the handful, chewing for the pure animal gratification of it. She was putting on more weight, and what did it matter?

Jeremy was different. He'd lost everything—his walk, his smile, the muscles of his upper arms and shoulders. Even his hair lay flat now, as if he couldn't bother with a tube of gel and a comb. When she saw him at the arraignment, saw him for the first time since she'd climbed out of the car and limped into the dorm with the blood wet on her legs, he looked like a refugee, like a ghost. The room they were in—the courtroom—seemed to have grown up around them, walls, windows, benches, lights, and radiators already in place, along with the judge, the American flag, and the ready-made spectators. It was hot. People coughed into their fists and shuffled their feet, every sound magnified. The judge presided, his arms like bones twirled in a bag, his eyes searching and opaque as he peered over the top of his reading glasses.

China's lawyer didn't like Jeremy's lawyer, that much was evident, and the state prosecutor didn't like anybody. She watched him—Jeremy, only him—as the reporters held their collective breath and the judge read off the charges and her mother bowed her head and sobbed into the bucket of her hands. And Jeremy was watching her, too, his eyes locked on hers as if he defied them all, as if nothing mattered in the world but her, and when the judge said *First-degree murder* and *Murder by abuse or neglect* he never flinched.

She sent him a note that day—"I love you, will always love you no matter what, More than Moon"—and in the hallway, afterward, while their lawyers fended off the reporters and the bailiffs tugged impatiently at them, they had a minute, just a minute, to themselves. "What did you tell them?" he whispered. His voice was a rasp, almost a growl; she looked at him, inches away, and hardly recognized him.

"I told them it was dead."

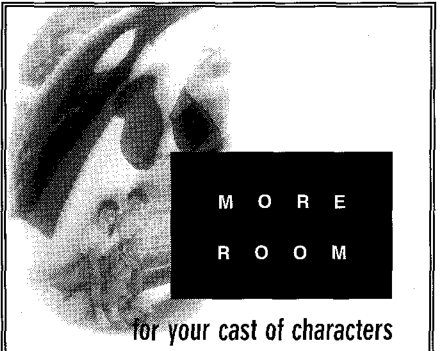
"My lawyer—Mrs. Teagues?—she says they're saying it was alive when we, when we put it in the bag." His face was composed, but his eyes were darting like insects trapped inside his head.

"It was dead."

"It looked dead," he said, and already he was pulling away from her and some callous shit with a camera kept annihilating them with flash after flash of light, "and we certainly didn't—I mean, we didn't slap it or anything to get it breathing. . . ."

And then the last thing he said to her, just as they were pulled apart, and it was nothing she wanted to hear, nothing that had any love in it, or even the hint of love: "You told me to get rid of it."

There was no elaborate name for the place where they were keeping him. It was known as Drum Hill Prison, period. No reform-minded notions here, no verbal gestures toward rehabilitation or behavior modification, no benefactors, mayors, or role models



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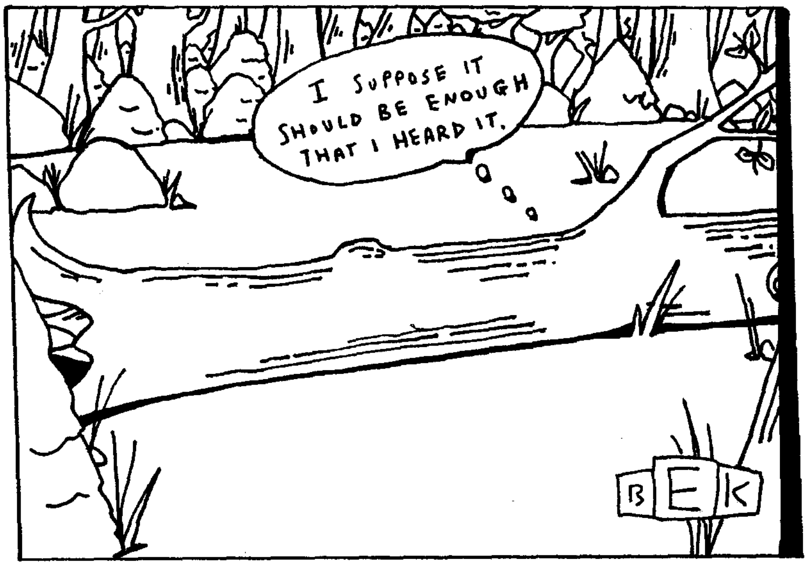

I SUPPOSE IT SHOULD BE ENOUGH THAT I HEARD IT.
BEK

to lend the place their family names, but then who in his right mind would want a prison named after him anyway? At least they kept him separated from the other prisoners, the gangbangers and dope dealers and sexual predators and the like. He was no longer a freshman at Brown, not officially, but he had his books and his course notes and he tried to keep up as best he could. Still, when the screams echoed through the cell block at night and the walls dripped with the accumulated breath of eight and a half thousand terminally angry sociopaths, he had to admit it wasn't the sort of college experience he'd bargained for.

And what had he done to deserve it? He still couldn't understand. That thing in the Dumpster—and he refused to call it human, let alone a baby—was nobody's business but his and China's. That's what he'd told his attorney, Mrs. Teagues, and his mother and her boyfriend, Howard, and he'd told them over and over again: *I didn't do anything wrong.* Even if it was alive, and it was, he knew in his heart that it was, even before the state prosecutor presented evidence of blunt-force trauma and death by asphyxiation and exposure, it didn't matter, or shouldn't have mattered. There was no baby. There was nothing but a mistake, a mistake clothed in blood and mucus. When he really thought about it, thought it through on its merits and dissected all his mother's pathetic arguments about where he'd be today if she'd felt as he did when she was pregnant herself, he hardened like a rock, like sand turning to stone under all the pressure the planet can bring to bear. Another unwanted child in an overpopulated world? They should have given him a medal.

It was the end of January before bail was set—three hundred and fifty thousand dollars his mother didn't have—and he was released to house arrest. He wore a plastic anklet that set off an alarm if he went out the door, and so did she, so did China, imprisoned like some fairy-tale princess at her parents' house. At first, she called him every day, but mostly what she did was cry—"I want to see it," she sobbed. "I want to see our daughter's *grave.*" That froze him inside. He tried to picture her—her now, China, the love of his life—and he couldn't. What did she look like? What was her face like, her nose, her hair, her eyes and breasts and the slit between her legs? He drew a blank. There was no way to summon her the way she used to be or even the way she was in court, because all he could remember was the thing that had come out of her, four limbs and the equipment of a female, shoulders rigid and eyes shut tight, as if she were a mummy in a tomb . . . and the breath, the shuddering long gasping rattle of a breath he could feel ringing inside her even as the black plastic bag closed over her face and the lid of the Dumpster opened like a mouth.

He was in the den, watching basketball, a drink in his hand (7Up mixed with Jack Daniel's in a ceramic mug, so no one would know he was getting shitfaced at two o'clock on a Sunday afternoon), when the phone rang. It was Sarah Teagues. "Listen, Jeremy," she said in her crisp, equitable tones, "I thought you ought to know—the Berkowitzes are filing a motion to have the case against China dropped."

His mother's voice on the portable, too loud, a blast of amplified breath and static: "On what grounds?"

"She never saw the baby, that's what they're saying. She thought she had a miscarriage."

"Yeah, right," his mother said.

Sarah Teagues was right there, her voice as clear and present as his mother's. "Jeremy's the one that threw it in the Dumpster, and they're saying he acted alone. She took a polygraph test day before yesterday."

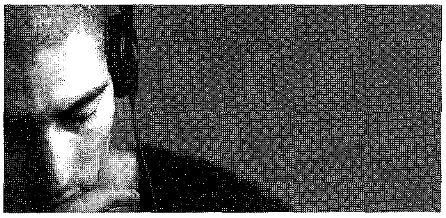
He could feel his heart pounding like it used to when he plodded up that last agonizing ridge behind the school with the cross-country team, his legs sapped, no more breath left in his body. He didn't say a word. Didn't even breathe.

"She's going to *testify* against him."

Outside was the world, puddles of ice clinging to the lawn under a weak afternoon sun, all the trees stripped bare, the grass dead, the azalea under the window reduced to an armload of dead brown twigs. She wouldn't have wanted to go out today anyway. This was the time of year she hated most, the long interval between the holidays and spring break, when nothing grew and nothing changed—it didn't even seem to snow much anymore. What was out there for her anyway? They wouldn't let her see Jeremy, wouldn't even let her talk to him on the phone or write him anymore, and she wouldn't be able to show her face at the mall or even the movie theatre without somebody shouting out her name as if she were a freak, as if she were another Monica Lewinsky or Heidi Fleiss. She wasn't China Berkowitz, honor student, not anymore—she was the punch line to a joke, a footnote to history.

She wouldn't mind going for a drive, though—that was something she missed, just following the curves out to the reservoir to watch the way the ice cupped the shore, or up to the turnout on Route 9 to look out over the river where it oozed through the mountains in a shimmering coil of light. Or to take a walk in the woods, just that. She was in her room, on her bed, posters of bands she'd outgrown staring down from the walls, her high-school books on two shelves in the corner, the closet door flung open on all the clothes she'd once wanted so desperately she could have died for each individual pair of boots or the cashmere sweaters that felt so good against her skin. At the bottom of her left leg, down there at the foot of the bed, was the anklet she wore now, the plastic anklet with the transmitter inside, no different, she supposed, than the collars they put on wolves to track them across all those miles of barren tundra or the bears sleeping in their dens. Except that hers had an alarm on it.

For a long while she just lay there gazing out the window, watching the rinsed-out sun slip down into the sky that had no more color in it than a TV tuned to an unsubscribed channel, and then she found herself picturing things the way they were an eon ago, when everything was green. She saw the azalea bush in bloom, the leaves knifing out of the trees, butterflies—or were they cabbage moths?—hovering over the flowers. Deep green. That was the color of the world. And she was remembering a night, summer before last, just after she and Jeremy started going together, the crickets thrumming, the air thick with humidity, and him singing along with the car radio, his voice so sweet and pure it was as if he'd written the song himself, just for her. And when they got to where they were going, at the end of that dark lane overhung with trees, to a place where it was private and hushed and the night fell in on itself as if it couldn't support the weight of the stars, he was as nervous as she was. She moved into his arms and they kissed, his lips groping for hers in the dark, his fingers trembling over the thin yielding silk of her blouse. He was Jeremy. He was the love of her life. And she closed her eyes and clung to him as if that were all that mattered. ♦



I was in another world, enraptured, unable to move ...

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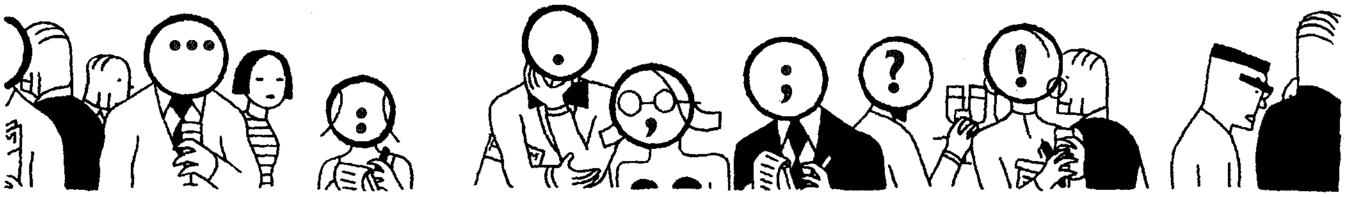


TULLIO PERICOLI

MUSICAL EVENTS

BACH 2K

Humanizing the Master, two hundred and fifty years after his death.

BY ALEX ROSS

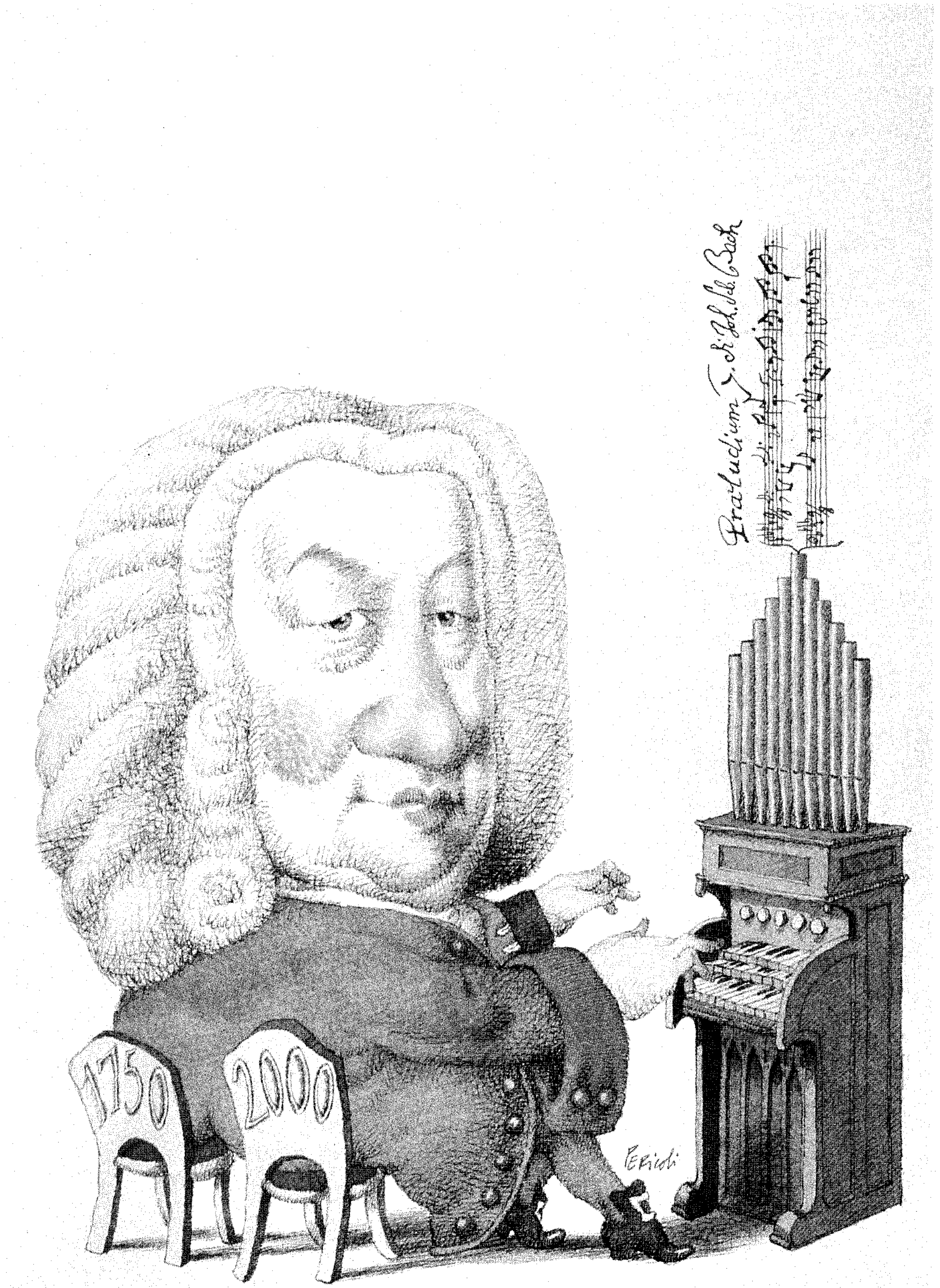
Bach was music's first holy ghost—the first composer to attain a godlike posthumous fame. The cult that grew up around him after his death was indistinguishable from the nascent culture of the "classical," in which the music of the past was deemed superior to the music of the present. When, in the seventeen-eighties, in Vienna, an aristocrat named Baron van Swieten began hosting concerts of "classics" in his home, it was no accident that Bach took pride of place. Mozart attended those events with interest, and wrote to his father, "Nothing is played but Handel and Bach." Beethoven closed out his visits with a selection of Bach fugues, "by way of final prayer." Swieten's concerts, with their refined and reverential atmosphere, marked, for better or worse, the beginning of modern concert life.

When people talk about Bach, they often sound like Erich von Stroheim in "Sunset Boulevard," as he intones, in tribute to Norma Desmond, "She vas de greatest of dem all." Piety is a problematic mode in which to celebrate the great composers. One can end up saying, in a distinctly off-putting way, not only that Bach or Beethoven or Wagner is the greatest but also that everything else is worthless. This is a problem of long standing. In 1802, Johann Forkel wrote a biography of Bach in which the alienating self-righteousness of the classical connoisseur was already on display. There is the churchy tone: "Bach's works cannot be spoken of . . . except with rapture, and some of them even with a kind of sacred awe." There is the unsocialized aestheticism: "He labored for himself, like every true genius." There is, of course, snobbery: "The public requires everything to be human, and the true artist ought properly to make everything divine." And there is the ritual suspicion that all intellectual life is expiring: "The spirit of the times, which is directed rather to trifles capable of affording immediate though fleeting enjoyment than to what is great . . . has, in some places, led to a proposal to banish the Greeks and Romans from our schools, and there can be no doubt that it would be glad to get rid of our musical classics also."

The stultifying atmosphere of the Bach cult circa 1802 persists two hundred years later. A new biography by Christoph Wolff moves through the minutiae of Bach's career and reaches this unerotic climax: "Constructed perfectly and sounding unique, Bach's compositions offer the ideal of bringing into congruence original thought, technical exactitude, and aesthetic beauty." "Constructed perfectly?" A plea in this Bach anniversary year: Let's talk about him as if he were made of flesh and blood. It is hard to reconcile most writing on Bach with the emotion created by the opening of the St. Matthew Passion, in which the chorus sings, on a staircase of dark chords, "Come, you daughters, help me lament." Here, neither beauty nor perfection is the point. The sound is grim, dense. The crowd churns as it wails, and grows in size. Its sorrow spreads from one section of the orchestra to another, from the orchestra to the chorus, and from the chorus to the audience. The composer of this music was very much concerned with the public, with the human. He did not deserve the clammy superlatives that rained on him after his death.

If you don't like Bach, now is the time to get out of town. The first wave of the anniversary onslaught arrived earlier this month, as Andras Schiff played the French and English Suites and the Partitas at Lincoln Center. A second, bigger wave is coming in April: the Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra and Choir, under the masterly Bach specialist Ton Koopman, will present a reconstruction of the lost St. Mark Passion, and Christian Tetzlaff will perform the complete works for solo violin. There is also a flood of recordings, with Teldec's "Bach 2000" edition—a hundred and fifty-three CDs—setting the high-water mark. At some point, all of this will get to be too much, but Schiff's series got the Bach year off to a very bright start: his playing was inauthentic, irreverent, and brilliant in the extreme. I've also been listening to Bach keyboard music on CD, and the liveliness and richness of recent recordings show that, in the hands of contemporary musicians, the composer is anything but a waxwork figure.

At the time of the last Bach jubilee, in 1985, when the man turned three hundred, academic pedantry had threatened to run amok. The "authentic performance" movement was cresting, and everyone seemed intent on playing Bach at the fastest possible tempos on antique instruments that could barely be heard in large halls. These days, pianists like Schiff, Richard Goode, Murray Perahia, and Angela Hewitt can appropriate Bach without fear of intellectual reprisal. (Recent research suggests, in


1750
2000
Præludium

A new generation of vibrant, Bach-loving musicians are turning the godlike composer into anything but a waxwork figure.

fact, that Bach was fascinated by the new keyboard instruments that were being introduced shortly before his death, and his harpsichord concertos may actually have been intended for the fortepiano.) In the realm of the authentic, harpsichord recordings by Andreas Staier, Bob van Asperen, Richard Egarr, and Pierre Hantai show a loosening of scholarly dogma. In contrast to the impersonal tinkling that prevailed a decade or two ago, these players indulge in bold gestures and rhythmic freedom. There's a pleasing bravura tone in the work of many younger performers who use original instruments; you hear it also in Andrew Manze's vibrant recordings of Bach violin concertos and sonatas, on Harmonia Mundi, and in Il Giardino Armonico's wild and beautiful account of the Brandenburgs, on Teldec.

It's interesting how different instruments produce different styles. The piano, with its big, "wet" sound, encourages players to hold back, be neat and crisp, temper their dynamics, and keep to an even tempo. Richard Goode and Angela Hewitt, in their gorgeous recordings of Bach's Partitas for the Nonesuch and Hyperion labels, keep within a fairly regular beat: the personality of the playing emerges in myriad subtle shadings and long legato lines. If they leaned any more heavily, the piano sound would muddy Bach's contrapuntal waters. Harpsichordists, however, tend to thump around and bend the line more freely; since the tonal and dynamic range of the instrument is limited, they make interpretive points with flashy rolls and rubato. Staier, in his authoritative survey of the Partitas for the Deutsche Harmonia Mundi label, constantly speeds up and slows down in a way that would come off as self-indulgently romantic if he were playing on a modern piano. It's a curious paradox: musicians who have grown up with authentic instruments have become ever more free-spirited in their playing. There is, plainly, no "correct" way of playing Bach, except to coax as much life out of the music as the instrument will allow.

Schiff's recent recitals, which were divided between Alice Tully Hall, a roomy chamber space, and Avery Fisher Hall, the cavernous home of the Philharmonic, bore no resemblance to any event that took place during Bach's lifetime. The keyboard works were intended more for private study than for public performance. Bach, had he been able to attend these events, would have been thoroughly bewildered by them—although he might have been delighted all the same. They were, first of all, remarkable feats of stamina. Schiff played from memory and missed nothing. At times, he pressed ahead too precipitously; in the First Partita, Hewitt better captures the music's dancing charm, and, in the Fourth Partita, Goode comes closer to the "singing style" that Bach once named as his ultimate goal. But Schiff picked up energy and passion as he went along. At the outset of each program, he seemed to be searching for a way to project these intimate pieces to a large audience. By the end, he had gone so far into the music that questions of scale and style disappeared. The counterpoint was feverishly clear, the dance rhythms had a vital stamp, and Bach's three- or four-note ideas rang out like trumpet blasts. A supposedly intellectual composer had been made purely visceral.

I was more or less stunned by Schiff's rendition of the Partita in E Minor, which closed the series, and the rest of the audience seemed to feel the same. Glenn Gould memorably played this piece as a document of spiritual exhaustion, but Schiff made its darkness seem heroic. Each dissonance in the opening movement was like a flinch of pain, and yet the music only gained in intensity. It's worth remembering that Bach's more outlandish harmonies—half-diminished chords, diminished sevenths with an added dissonance, a triad plus a major seventh—recur in the most self-consciously daring passages of romantic music, and that the first few measures of the E-Minor Partita contain Wagner's chords for Tristan's longing and Amfortas's wound. It's worth remembering also that the St. Matthew Passion was composed at about the same time as the Partitas, and that it speaks much the same language. Like the chorus in the Passion, Schiff led the audience into a quiet fury of emotion, and it responded with a cathartic roar. ♦

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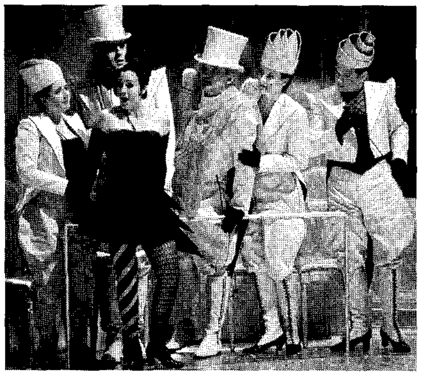
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BOOKS

PAPER CHASE

A novel about one of capitalism's great crises.

BY JOHN CASSIDY

In 1711, the Earl of Oxford had a brain wave. The British government, after warring expensively with France for many years, owed its creditors the enormous sum of nine million pounds. Why not, the Earl suggested, transfer this obligation to some enterprising merchants, who, in return for agreeing to pay the interest on the debt, and eventually the principal, too, would be granted a monopoly on trade with South America? Why not, the Earl's colleagues at Westminster agreed. All that was necessary was to outfit some ships, load them with British manufactures, and set them on a course for the South Atlantic. Doubters brushed aside, the venture was launched under the name of the South Sea Company.

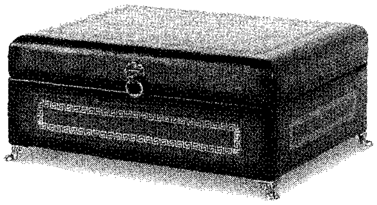
David Liss

THOMAS LIBETTI

The only problem was Spain, which ruled much of South America and had no intention of allowing a bunch of Limeys to make off with its treasure. The Spanish did agree to let the British provide Spain's colonies, for thirty years, with African slaves, but transporting slaves was always a questionable financial proposition. London was allowed to send just one cargo ship a year to engage in other kinds of trade; and even that concession was suspended in 1718, when Britain and Spain started one of their frequent wars. But it's a characteristic of great speculative episodes that, until the bitter end, they are impervious to bad news. The South Sea Company's stock remained popular, and when peace came, in December, 1719, its directors stepped up their ambitions, proposing to take on about thirty-one million pounds of Britain's national debt. Sir Robert Walpole warned that such a scheme might lure "the unwary to their ruin, by making them part with the earnings of their labor for a prospect of imaginary wealth." Parliament nonetheless voted in favor. Almost immediately, the South Sea Company's stock price jumped from a hundred and twenty-six pounds to four hundred pounds; by August, it had reached a thousand pounds. The country was gripped by a frenzy of greed that Alexander Pope recorded thus:

> Statesman and patriot ply alike the stocks,
> Peeress and butler share alike the box,
> And judges job, and bishops bite the town,
> And mighty dukes pack cards for half-a-crown.
> See Britain sunk in lucre's sordid charms,
> And France revenged on Anne's and Edward's arms!

Not content with trading the South Sea Company's paper, investors had fastened on the stocks of dozens of new firms, which became known as Bubbles. (The British have always had a sense of humor.) As Charles Mackay detailed in his 1841 book, "Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds," no project was too outlandish to support a Bubble: there was one "for improving the art of making soap," another "for extracting silver from lead," and a third calling for the establishment of an insurance company guaranteeing female chastity. The most notorious of all was one "for carrying on an undertaking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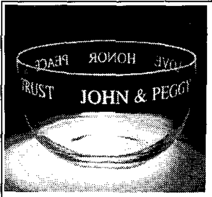

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BRIEFLY NOTED

Everything You Know, *by Zoë Heller (Knopf; $22).* Willy Muller, the antihero of this caustic and ultimately devastating novel, is a German-born Brit foundering in Hollywood. Now a ghostwriter, Willy earned his notoriety years ago: he did or did not kill his wife, Oona, during a drunken spat. When he has occasion to read his daughter's childhood journals, which artlessly chronicle his sins of omission, the result is a quirky, joyous spectacle: a middle-aged son of a bitch who, given a chance to grow up, takes it.

Two Moons, *by Thomas Mallon (Pantheon; $24).* In this unusual romance, set in Washington in 1877, the author invents a pair of mismatched lovers—Cynthia, a Civil War widow with a head for figures, and Hugh, an astronomer with "immortal longings"—and sets them loose among a historical cast. The most robust of these characters is Roscoe Conkling, a Republican senator from New York, who despises the President (the ineffable Rutherford B. Hayes) and has a liking for women other than his wife. In Mallon's stylishly engineered plot, which includes the "malleable art" of astrology, M. Mangin's aplanatic-mirror projector, and the unfinished Washington Monument, Hugh tries to secure his place among the stars.

Ladies and Not-So-Gentle Women, *by Alfred Allan Lewis (Viking; $39.95).* An engrossing social history and group biography of four New York women, brought up amid Victorian propriety, whose lives became intertwined as they pioneered new roles for their sex. Elisabeth Marbury was the first woman literary agent, and Elsie de Wolfe the first woman interior decorator. Anne Morgan (J.P.'s daughter) served on the board of the Women's Trade Union League, and Anne Vanderbilt, while mentoring delinquent girls, was among the first to note the link between crime and addiction. (Three of Lewis's heroines may have been lesbians, but he doesn't know whether their liaisons were physical.) The author follows his subjects from salon to slum and back, providing an appreciation of their originality and a sense of their era.

A Renaissance in Harlem, *edited by Lionel C. Bascom (Bard; $24).* The W.P.A. Writers' Project of the nineteen-thirties compiled more than ten thousand narratives detailing the life stories of ordinary people across the country. Sadly, the projected anthologies never materialized, and the manuscripts were archived, lost, or destroyed. This book rescues fifty-four such pieces, collected in Harlem by a team of writers that included Ralph Ellison and Dorothy West. The precisely rendered testimony—preserving the vernacular of beggars, pushcart peddlers, washerwomen, Pullman porters, night-club entertainers, and Father Divine disciples—is by turns heartrending, enraging, strange, and hilarious.

Greene on Capri, *by Shirley Hazzard (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $22).* Hazzard says of Graham Greene's sojourns on Capri that the island was "an unlikely—one might say, a resplendent—setting for a man largely unmoved by visual experience." But nothing about this enchanting place is wasted on the author, whose off-season stays there with her husband, the late Francis Steegmuller, often coincided with Greene's own. She and Greene become acquainted in the piazzetta over a quotation from Browning, and as the friendship develops the literary references accrue until Hazzard professes to feel "hopelessly outclassed." She paints Greene talking—not just his words but his gestures, pauses, and occasional eye-popping fits of temper—and takes frequent detours into local legends about residents from Tiberius to Lenin, who visited Gorky there and taught a few useful Russian phrases ("We don't give discounts") to his gardener's daughter.

of great advantage; but nobody to know what it is." The sponsor of this particular Bubble, having watched investors plunk down money for his stock in the morning, set off for the Continent that very afternoon, cash in hand, never to return.

It all makes for an astonishing tale and one well suited for a fictional retelling, especially given the recent gyrations on Wall Street. Unfortunately, David Liss's "A Conspiracy of Paper" (Random House; $25) doesn't really do the job. True, his story revolves around the South Sea Company, but it takes place in 1719, a year before the bubble was fully inflated, and its crux is forgery, not speculation. Liss's book is not a financial novel but an old-fashioned detective story, with London's teeming streets and taverns as its backdrop. As such, it's an artfully constructed potboiler: the sort of thing that would make a good "Mystery!" series on PBS, with a young John Thaw as Benjamin Weaver, a retired Jewish boxer (the Lion of Judah) trying to find the murderers of his late father, an Exchange Alley stockbroker who unwisely tried to expose the nefarious nature of the South Sea Company. The plot rattles along, with Weaver encountering enough roguish aristocrats, fiendish cutthroats, and buxom lasses—not to mention roguish cutthroats, fiendish lasses, and buxom aristocrats—to keep a costume department at work for several months.

In a historical note at the book's end, Liss, a Columbia student who is writing a doctoral thesis on eighteenth-century English literature, says, "My goal in this novel has been to capture both the unbridled enthusiasm and the pervasive anxiety of the period leading up to the South Sea Bubble." This would be an ambitious aim for a Tolstoy or a Dickens, let alone a novice writer, and Liss might have been wiser to say that he was trying to tell an interesting story and leave it at that. He has done his time in the archives, and his verisimilitude is often impressive. Weaver, the main character, is based on Daniel Mendoza, a noted figure who credited himself with inventing the "scientific method of boxing" and later became a debt collector. The main villains of the plot—Jonathan Wild and his two henchmen, Mendes and Arnold—were genuine London gangsters, and nasty ones at that, who have lived on in English folklore.

In truth, though, Liss's aptly titled novel tells us almost as much about twenty-first-century book publishing as it does about the South Sea Bubble. Historical fiction, especially about Britain, has proved extremely popular in recent years, and "A Conspiracy of Paper" is Random House's latest attempt to cash in on the trend. It may well succeed. Like the old standbys of the genre (such as Patrick O'Brian and George MacDonald Fraser) and the newer arrivals (Iain Pears's "An Instance of the Fingerpost"), too, it combines dutiful research with a style that evokes the era in which it is set without actually resorting to old English. Liss is commendably honest about his technique, writing in his afterword, "I have, in the language of this novel, tried to suggest the rhythms of eighteenth-century prose, although I have made many modifications in the interest of readability." The result is not without a certain macho gusto—there is much talk of "swiving whores," "callous jades," and "bastardly gullions"—but sometimes it evokes Monty Python more than Daniel Defoe, as in the passage where Weaver encounters Kate Cole, a shapely, if somewhat soiled, trollop:

> "What did I notice about you?" I repeated back to her. "I noticed the redness of your lips, the whiteness of your throat, and the delicate curve of your chin"—I reached out and rested my hand against the side of her face—"and the marvellous line of your cheekbones. You look to me like a glorious and sensual angel in an Italian painting."
>
> Kate squinted at me. "Most gen'men say they likes me arse."
>
> "You were sitting upon it when I noticed you," I explained.

In the novel, Weaver finally manages, through luck and persistence, to bring the wrongdoers to justice, with only the guilty being harmed. It wasn't so easy for Britain. During August of 1720, rumors spread that South Sea Company directors were quietly unloading stocks, and the buying stampede reversed course. By the end of September, the South Sea Company's stock price had fallen to a hundred and eighty pounds, and many investors had lost everything. (Sir Isaac Newton was one of the casualties.) Amid the clamor for vengeance, it emerged that several government ministers had been bribed to support the South Sea Company, which was eventually taken over by the Bank of England and the East India Company. The Chancellor of the Exchequer was imprisoned in the Tower of London, but the treasurer of the South Sea Company, a

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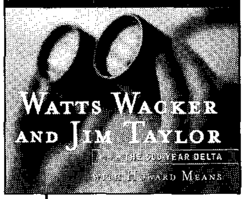

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fellow named Knight, fled the country and was never returned to justice. In the scandal's wake, Parliament passed the Bubble Act, which for more than a century barred companies not chartered by the government from issuing stock.

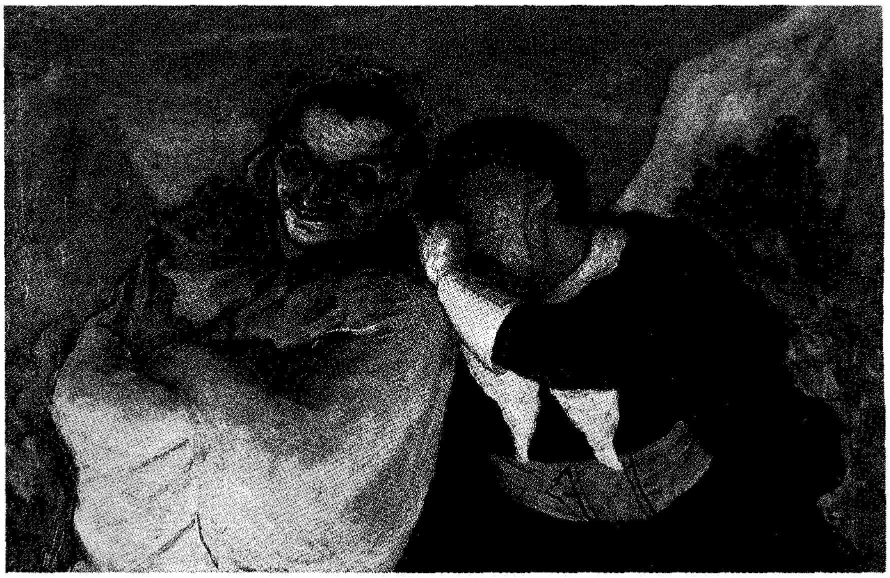
Viewed from an era in which more Americans than ever are invested in the stock market, many of them convinced that stock prices move in one direction only, this appears to have been an unduly draconian measure. If all those money-losing Internet companies with billion-dollar valuations start popping like so many Bubbles, the Bubble Act may seem a lot more explicable. Then we will need a contemporary Pope or Swift to capture our version of the Madness of Crowds. ♦

THE ART WORLD

CITIZEN DAUMIER

A show in Washington celebrates the supreme satirist.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL



Daumier's "Crispin and Scapin" (circa 1863-65): An archetype of horrible delight.

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An Honoré Daumier retrospective—the first ever in America, astonishingly—has arrived in Washington, D.C., a year late. During the impeachment ordeal, I found myself thinking more than once, Where's a Daumier when you need one? Imagine the nineteenth-century Frenchman's lampoons of the Henry Hyde posse. Our contemporary wits performed ably but predictably, deploying standard repertoires that are fine for the common run of public obloquy but unequal to blossomings of really epic squalor. Besides being, curiously, a great artist, Daumier remains the Homer of topical derision, and rivalled in history only by William Hogarth, the caricaturist's caricaturist. Who knows? The high-profile presence of his stuff at the Phillips Collection, had it occurred last year, might have spurred his pallid heirs to outdo themselves a little.

This show, which appeared previously in Paris and in Ottawa and will end on May 14th, concentrates on making a case for Daumier as a painter and a prophetic stylist. It displays seventy-five of his roughly three hundred known paintings and just seventy-four of a hard-to-believe four thousand or so lithographs, from a career that stretched from 1830 to his retirement, with failing eyesight, in 1872. (He died in 1879.) In addition, there are fifty-seven drawings and watercolors and thirty-nine sculptures. Daumier truly was an artistic progenitor, revered by subsequent masters from Degas through Cézanne and Toulouse-

Lautrec to Picasso. (Degas owned eighteen hundred Daumier lithographs at one point.) But the carbolic bite of the supreme satirist wins through. Eerily impersonal when he made art on his own lookout, he sparkled when he had targets. Spleen became him.

Born in 1808, Daumier was one of many children of a Marseilles glazier who came to Paris to pursue a dream of being a dramatic poet. The Daumier family was very poor. All but unschooled, Daumier was apprenticed as an errand boy to a bailiff at the age of twelve. A year later, he became a clerk at a bookstore near the Louvre, and he haunted the museum. He trained with a painter friend of his family, a minor follower of Jacques-Louis David. Michelangelo, Rubens, and Rembrandt inspired him, as did printmakers, including Goya. He hung around ateliers and did odd jobs in printshops. Reportedly, he seldom talked, because he was embarrassed by a stutter. He made his first lithographs at the age of fourteen. The new medium of grease on stone, just ten years older than Daumier himself, was becoming a cynosure of commercial and journalistic culture. Meanwhile, Republican politics seethed under the Bourbon Restoration. Young Daumier became a partisan.

The equivocal revolution of 1830 brought in the "Citizen King" Louis-Philippe and a spell of relative press freedom. That is, although publications were not subject to prior restraint, perceived offenses regularly incurred police raids, seizures of printed material, arrests, and trials. Daumier's talent flowered in the pages of *La Caricature*, a weekly that, among other things, made endlessly ingenious sport of the King's pear-shaped head. Daumier spent five months in jail for his 1831 lithograph "Gargantua"—not published in the magazine but offered for sale—which shows a monstrous Louis-Philippe being fed the wealth of France by a procession of citizens. Daumier's developing rhetorical tones ranged from such virulence to the sublimity of perhaps the finest polemical print ever made, "Rue Transnonain, 15 April 1834," about a massacre by national-guard troops during riots on the eponymous day. A workman in a bloodstained nightshirt and his family lie dead in their disordered bedroom. "In this cold attic all is silence and death," Daumier's friend Charles Baudelaire wrote of the picture, which he termed "not precisely caricature—it is history, reality, both trivial and terrible."

Blanket censorship descended anew in 1835, ending *La Caricature* and driving Daumier from political to broadly social subjects. (His last contribution to the journal depicted three martyrs of 1830 remarking on the fruits of their sacrifice, "It was certainly worthwhile getting killed!") Modern culture owes a great deal to that particular crackdown, which helped to initiate the long march of the avant-garde: "symbolic politics" with an ever more elaborate vengeance. Forbidden to attack important individuals and political parties, Daumier took on empowered professions. Rather like Charles Dickens across the Channel—only more so—he killed all the lawyers, figuratively speaking. "The Men of Justice," a mighty and uproarious series that began in the eighteen-forties, may be his most lastingly pertinent feat, alas. Take away robes and wigs and period gestures, and there, filleted, are the vanity, presumption, and all-around disingenuousness that forever barnacle that excellent principle the rule of law.

Guillaume Apollinaire would call Daumier "the Michelangelo of the lithograph." It's true. Like no other satirical artist, Daumier drew the figure in muscular action, creating pictorial space as elbow room for specific postures and gestures. The space flows, because line and shadow are inseparable. So are idea and execution. Like Michelangelo in another use of stone, Daumier can seem to discover, rather than produce, his lithographic subjects, paring them out of blankness. Add to this that he is the Balzac of his métier, with battalions of recognizable characters on call: the poor and middle classes of Paris in their infinite particularity, taking star turns onstage. Daumier's extravagant artistic and literary gifts give rise to his signature humor: rhetorical grandeur applied, with unmistakable sincerity, to vulgar material. He makes common citizenship seem the most exalted, funny, and delicious fate.

Satirists tend to be elusive people. Aggressively shy, they want us to look at what they look at, not at them. They infect us with attitudes, behind which may crouch only inchoate hurt. A satirist's ballast is what he knows of human hearts.

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In Goya, the weight is Saturnian, at times frightening. (Like the survivors in "King Lear," we feel that we "shall never see so much, nor live so long.") In Daumier, the burden is lighter but extensive, steely, and bristling—with a strange softness at the core. An almost secretive tenderness makes him permanently puzzling. We know the spectacle of satirists tumbling into maudlin sentimentality when they're off their game. Daumier's frequent recourse to themes of mothers and children ought to fit this case, but it happens to occasion some of his best work, especially in painting. Take "The Laundress," which is seen at the Phillips in three versions from around 1861: a muscular woman, bearing laundry, bends to help her little girl up steps from the Seine. They are semi-silhouettes against a blaze of yellow-white sun on distant buildings. One senses a vast metropolis pivoting, like a galaxy, on a tiny event: a small hand that is grasped, just so, by a large one.

One hardly knows what to make of such beauty from Daumier. It is a typical surprise of his painting, in which he apparently tried on a succession of different selves. These briefly included a would-be Salon-style religious painter. With a haplessly debonair St. Sebastian and a ridiculous sexpot of an anguished Mary Magdalene, probably painted between 1848 and 1852, Daumier made a fool of himself for perhaps the first and last time. His most candid paintings treat the life of art in studios and printshops—a collegiality of lonely men. His most exciting paintings visit the theatre, often during a production of Molière. The footlighted Crispin and Scapin (circa 1863-65)—the one character leering at the other's whispered confidence—boosts a moment of high comedy to some archetypal place of horrible delight. This painting seems to me a window into what it felt like to be Daumier when he was afire. He didn't wear a mask at such times. He *was* a mask.

It's easy to see why Daumier so influenced later artists—to the degree that his later, moodily grimy painting style seems to blend directly into early Cézanne. Some of his favorite formal tropes, like having remote backgrounds slam up behind intimate foregrounds (as in "The Laundress"), would be fundamental to modern picture-making. But Daumier's prescience transcends form. It is apparent in the very fragmentation of his personality. He was a man of the crowd, who attained wholeness only in fleeting instants, when his emotion and that of the crowd were one. As often as not, the emotion is resentment directed at some false representative of the public good. But the indignation turns cheerful with enjoyment of its own force—the ultimately fateful power of the people—and laughter comes down like cleansing rain. Daumier's age concentrated, in him, a function that today is dispersed and diminished among many mediums of popular culture. At this show, one feels close to a pure democratic necessity: the supremacy of the joke. ♦

THE THEATRE

NONSENSE AND SENSIBILITY

A cold new play and a hot old musical.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

David Lindsay-Abaire, whose play "Fuddy Meers" ran last fall at the Manhattan Theatre Club and moved to the Minetta Lane Theatre early this year, once wrote a play called "The Kitchen Sink Drama," and it wouldn't have been a bad idea to call this new production "The Everything-but-the-Kitchen-Sink Comedy" (if it weren't for the fact that there *is* a kitchen sink in it). The play is full of incident and absurdity and wacky coincidence and plot twists. The problem is that it is also full of emptiness.

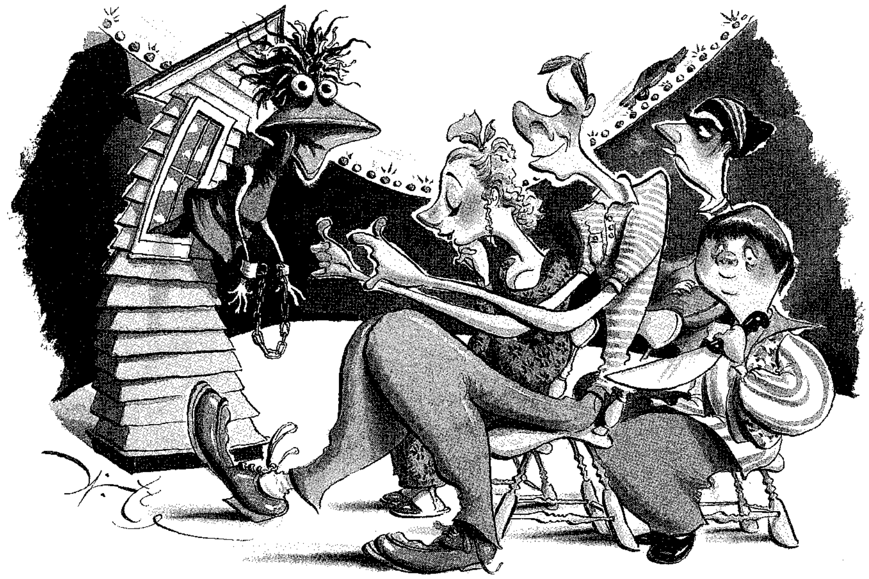
"Fuddy Meers" revolves around Claire (J. Smith-Cameron), who wakes up one morning and is told by her husband, Richard (Robert Stanton), that she has amnesia—that two years ago her memory simply disappeared. "The strange thing is you're usually very lucid and capable of understanding complex thoughts," he tells her. "You even retain an enormous amount of information in the course of the day, but as soon as you go to sleep, it's gone. The next morning we have to start all over again." Smith-Cameron, who plays this role with droll innocence and sweetness, says to him, "That must be very annoying for you." Stanton, who's very good at playing characters with disruptive ids that lurk just beneath a deadpan veneer of conventionality, replies, "Yes, it is." Moments later, while Richard is taking a shower, a man wearing a ski mask slips out from under the bed and tells Claire that he's her brother Zack, and that she has to escape with him, because her husband plans to kill her. Zack, who is played by Patrick Breen, has a blind eye, a limp, a bad lisp, and an ear that's a "twisted mass of burnt scar tissue," as Claire observes with detached fascination—not to mention that he's got a manacle on one wrist, with a length of chain dangling from it. (Ooooo, I smell trouble.) He tells Claire that he's taking her to their mother's house in the country, and adds, "She had a thtroke rethently and hath trouble forming thententheth properly." Sure enough, the mother, Gertie (Marylouise Burke), delivers the goods, saying things like "I jez hava fidful oh da balcony cuz yo foddeh lie dit so moo, I jez godden haboo of keeboo da-roun oda tie." (I rely for my spelling on a copy of the play, to which is attached a handy guide to Gertie's "Stroke-Talk." The play's title, by the way, comes from Gertie's way of saying the words "funny mirrors.")

For some reason, Gertie's disability and Zack's constellation of disabilities seemed to be big crowd-pleasers the night I saw the play, and they unfailingly drew laughter. Of course, people often laugh at the oddest moments in the theatre, sometimes perhaps only to prove to themselves that they're having a good time and getting their money's worth, or that they "get it." I had no idea what Lindsay-Abaire was getting at, so I didn't get it. I'm all for tasteless humor—it can reveal a lot of awful truths worth hearing—but I couldn't find more than one dimension to the muddled waggery and gaggery of "Fuddy Meers." Call me spoiled, but I like to come away from the theatre feeling something other than that I just attended a Helen Keller-joke marathon.

To complete the scenario, Claire's

teen-age son is dyslexic, and a crony of Zack's named Millet (John Christopher Jones), who shows up at Gertie's house—also, tellingly, sporting a manacle on one wrist—has an unruly alter ego in the form of a sock puppet called Hinky Binky. Jones, who is working in poor soil, nonetheless often manages to be not just creepy but also touching and funny (and not simply because he bears a strong resemblance to John Candy, who was always touching and funny).

In fact, all the actors in "Fuddy Meers" are good, and they make the most of what cleverness it does contain. And the production is terrific; it's well directed by David Petrarca, the resident director of Chicago's Goodman Theatre, and it has a very effective, evocative set by Santo Loquasto. Lindsay-Abaire is fortunate in his collaborators here, and he seems to be blessed by good fortune in general: the program says that he is a recent graduate of Juilliard's playwriting program (he wrote and first workshopped "Fuddy Meers" while he was there), yet he has already written more than half a dozen plays, received three commissions, and won four awards; his next play will star Janeane Garofalo; and he has a screenplay in development at Twentieth Century Fox. Clearly, he's going places, and is, as they say, someone to watch; at the moment, though, he has the bad fortune to be represented by a play that's exhausting to watch and goes no place at all.



The cast of "Fuddy Meers" makes the most of what cleverness the play contains.

MICHAEL WITTE

In 1954, the twenty-four-year-old Stephen Sondheim, having just quit his job writing for the TV series "Topper," began work on what was supposed to be his first Broadway musical. Called "Saturday Night," it was based on "Front Porch in Flatbush," a play by the twin brothers Julius J. and Philip G. Epstein (who wrote the screenplay for "Casablanca"). The following year, however, the musical's producer died, and the production never materialized. It wasn't until 1997, when the Bridewell Theatre, in London, put the show on, that "Saturday Night" was mounted anywhere; another production followed in Chicago last year. Now, finally, at the Second Stage Theatre, New Yorkers can see this "small charming show," to use the composer's own characterization. It's been a long wait, but in a way the timing is perfect: Sondheim will turn seventy in a few weeks, and the Second Stage production, which is under the direction of Kathleen Marshall, is not only a lovely birthday present but also an occasion to celebrate his more than four decades' worth of work in musical theatre.

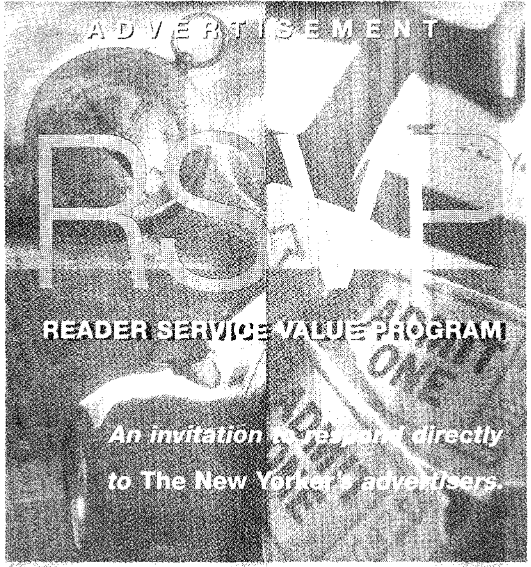
"Saturday Night," although it was written in the fifties and is set in the twenties, is timely in another way: the male lead, Gene (David Campbell), a Brooklyn boy, is obsessed with getting rich. He's a lowly runner on Wall Street, but he has big dreams—he wants to move to Manhattan and live the high life—and he has a scheme for achieving them: he and his friends are going to invest in a stock that's a sure thing. The plan misfires, he loses the money (that's right, children—once upon a time, people sometimes *lost* money in the stock market), and he gets in trouble both with the law and with his girlfriend. In the end, of course, he redeems himself, and all's right with the world again.

The story is a corny one, and the Brooklyn depicted here is of the standard-issue sentimental variety. The borough is a kind of big-city Brigadoon: people can't wait to get out, and they can't wait to come back. Sondheim's music and, especially, his lyrics highlight and heighten this ambivalence, with equal parts wit, melancholy, and acute detail. He both sends up and sympathizes with the characters, and at the same time has a lot of fun tweaking the illusions purveyed by popular entertainment. In the song "In the Movies," one of the high points of the show, four of Gene's pals argue and complain about how much money each of them has spent on the two women they've taken to the pictures. Then the women start up, and sing about the gulf between real life à la Hollywood and real life à la Brooklyn:

In the movies, when a girl has come from
the wrong side of the tracks,
In a week she has a wealthy chum who
can buy her presents at Saks.
You can start with a bagel and end up
with Conrad Nagel on the screen,
But in life you wind up right behind a
pillar in the mezzanine.

The music here sounds alternately like a patriotic anthem and a dirge—Sondheim actually interpolates Chopin's Funeral March into his melody. In "Saturday Night," the tune that begins the show, the same four friends are hanging out on Gene's front porch; one of them is playing a piano, and another one idly strums a ukulele. They lament not having dates for the evening, and a palpable shock of recognition went through the audience when one of them sang, "The moon's like a million-watt electric light/It shines up the city as it climbs/And I gotta spend another Saturday night/At home with the Sunday *Times*."

"Saturday Night" may be a "small charming show," but, thanks to Sondheim's wise and funny lyrics (and this production's wonderful cast), it's much more than a mere curiosity. It has that something extra that New York is famous for: it has moxie. ♦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THE CURRENT CINEMA

SHADES OF BLACK

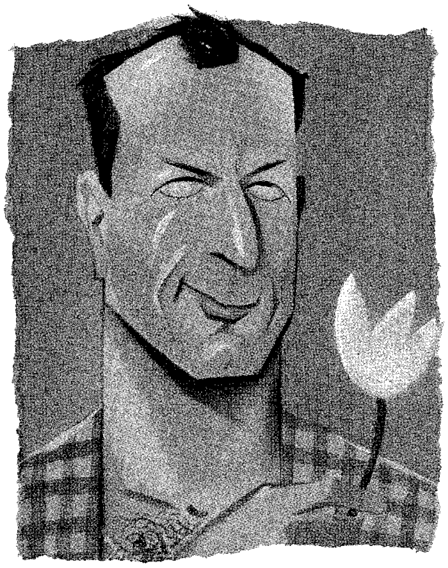
Comic killing in the suburbs, and tragedy in France.

BY ANTHONY LANE

Black comedy is good for you. Watching Alec Guinness in, say, "The Ladykillers" or "Kind Hearts and Coronets," we are reminded both of the immanence of death, forever poised around the corner with carving knife and club, and of the healthy pretense that extinction, however unfortunate, is not the end of the world—that our passing could be the merest sting, no worse than that of a bee. Guinness, as courteous and cadaverous as the Reaper himself, made those great films in the shadow of the Second World War, as if to prove by gentle farce that there were other ways to meet with suffering than to lie down and weep. More recently, we have seen the acidic pranks of "Beetlejuice," "Heathers," and "To Die For," but not a whole lot else. (We have sick comedy, courtesy of directors like Todd Solondz, but that exists on a diet of dysfunction, not death.) It may well be that twenty years of action movies, with their ceaseless entwining of violence and one-liners, has put the whole genre out of business. These days, we take our comedy with skim milk.

So what hope is there for "The Whole Nine Yards" and "Drowning Mona," a pair of light little pictures with modestly dark ambitions? The first stars Matthew Perry as Oz, a Montreal dentist with a foul Francophone wife (Rosanna Arquette). Their new neighbor is Jimmy (the Tulip) Tudeski (Bruce Willis), a former contract killer who is now hiding from his past—in particular, from the wounded pride of the mobster Janni Gogolak (Kevin Pollak). Also in the game are a rival hit man (Michael Clarke Duncan) and Janni's wife (Natasha Henstridge). The plot demands that each of the above, with the dishonorable exception of Oz, should want or attempt to kill at least one of the others. And even Oz, whether he admits it or not, would make a merry widower.

The film was directed by Jonathan Lynn and written by Mitchell Kapner; the production notes boast that the script was circulated, and the deal done, in the course of a single plane flight. It shows. What should be a web of mean motives soon turns into a tangle; I felt my interest falter and fade as we cut without warning to Niagara Falls, where poor Rosanna Arquette (in a pig of a part) has to make love to a new character purely so that he can show up later, during the big shoot-out, with a gun.



Bruce Willis as Jimmy (the Tulip) Tudeski in "The Whole Nine Yards."

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Black comedy cries out for clarity; by tradition one of the more literate forms, it works best when the narrative matches the murderous rigor of the characters. Only rarely in "The Whole Nine Yards" do you get that kind of snap, and even then you can see the jokes coming: "I try to keep things as painless as possible," says Oz the dentist. "Me, too," says the Tulip.

Comedy of every shade tends to get a raw visual deal, as if it were too wordy to warrant anything better. This one is a particular eyesore, both on the grand scale—watch the wobbly pans over Montreal—and in the deeply unflattering closeups of Matthew Perry, who will probably take one look and run straight back to television. His stop-go nerviness is a passable foil for Bruce Willis's smirking suavity, and they should team up again for something that actually resembles a movie. Best of all is Amanda Peet, who plays Jill, Oz's dental assistant, and a fan of the Tulip, whom she presses for homicidal advice. She shakes Tabasco over her hamburger as if trying to poison it, and cheerfully confronts the Mob wearing nothing but an automatic. Jonathan Lynn made another ordinary film, "My Cousin Vinny," which was rescued by Marisa Tomei; maybe the discovery of smart young actresses is his thing.

"Drowning Mona," too, has a surprisingly strong cast, whose members must have thought they were heading for serious fun, and only realized their mistake when it was too late. Danny De Vito plays the police chief of Verplanck, a small town on the Hudson that is plunged into amusement by the demise of Mona (Bette Midler), a wife and mother with the temper of an unfed mastiff. Nobody liked her, and somebody loathed her enough to snip the brake leads on her car and send it over a cliff. Was it her cheating, hairy husband (William Fichtner)? Was it his co-cheater (Jamie Lee Curtis)? Was it Mona's unrelievedly dim son (Marcus Thomas), or his business partner (Casey Affleck), who looks like John-Boy Walton but reputedly used his lawnmower on a dog named Peaches? Who can tell?

Well, not me. There is a sudden spasm of revelation at the end of the picture, but it's so badly fumbled that, two days later, I am genuinely unable to remember, let alone care, who the murderer was. The movie starts in high spirits and simply trails away, and the director, Nick Gomez, relies perhaps too heavily on the hilarious fact that all the townspeople drive the same make of car. If you are committed to black comedy, you have to be prepared to buck the system at every turn; it isn't just vehicles that need to be sabotaged but our hopes of resolution. There is no more grievous indictment of "The Whole Nine Yards" and "Drowning Mona" than the depressing way in which both conclude with a marriage—promised in one, celebrated in another. The blackness, in other words, was never a spreading stain, or a caution against the vanity of human wishes; it was an interruption and a glitch. Life, alas, goes on.

Film Forum has got itself a scoop. For two weeks, beginning March 1st, it will be showing "Alone" and "The Little Thief," two short films by Erick Zonca, who made "The Dream Life of Angels," the most stirring film to appear in the United States last year. These are minor works by comparison: "The Little Thief" runs just over an hour, "Alone" for half that. But they confirm, as if proof were needed, that Zonca is hardly a one-shot wonder; if anything, he seems so possessed by his characters that, like demons, they could easily pursue him for a lifetime.

"Alone" stars Florence Loiret as Amélie, a young woman who argues with her employer and loses her job. "The Little Thief" stars Nicolas Duvauchelle as Esse, a young man who argues with his employer and loses his job. The keen-eyed viewer will discern a pattern here. Zonca is gripped by work—how it meets the needs of the body, and how quickly its routines anesthetize the soul. He offers no solutions to that crux; he just watches his characters step off the ladder of society and tumble down. In truth, few of them have far to fall; Amélie and Esse start out on the bottom rung and take it from there. Both are obnoxious at the start—loud and pushy, screwing up their faces in injured wrath. But that, you quickly gather, was their last gasp; from now on, they are either mumbling or mute.

The question casually thrown up by these films is so hot that few of today's American movies would dare to touch it: How, and why, and when do the inarticulate sink into crime? American criminals—even the most troubling ones, as devised by De Niro and Scorsese—are certified loudmouths, speaking in tongues that their fists duly obey. But when Amélie finds a gun, and when Esse joins a pack of Marseilles thugs who box and steal, you get a dreadful inkling that brutality, of some description, will soon be their only line of communication with the world. "Do you know how to take blows?" says one of the thugs to Esse as they joust in the ring. Esse is pallid and gaunt, with a bruise on his temple and a livid cut above his brow—hardly fit to fight, which makes him still more dangerous. People do more harm to themselves than to others in these films, and Zonca is unashamedly interested in bodies as battlegrounds. His camera looks at Amélie—wholly without lust, for she is beyond thinking of herself as lovable—while she showers in a homeless shelter. She is as hunched and spindly as a figure in a Cranach painting, and the idea that anyone could imprison this girl—or imprison her further—is a bad joke. What amazes me about Zonca is that he can grapple with such problems and not harangue; as if in fellow feeling with his heroes, he has refined a style of simmering quietness, with elliptical cuts and unforeseen jolts of beauty. The final shot of "Alone" is a perfect composition: a table being wiped in a café, as if Amélie's tale were being cleaned away. "The Little Thief," even more sharply, ends with two knives: one slicing a throat, the other scoring dough for French bread. If you can take the blows, go and see for yourself. ♦

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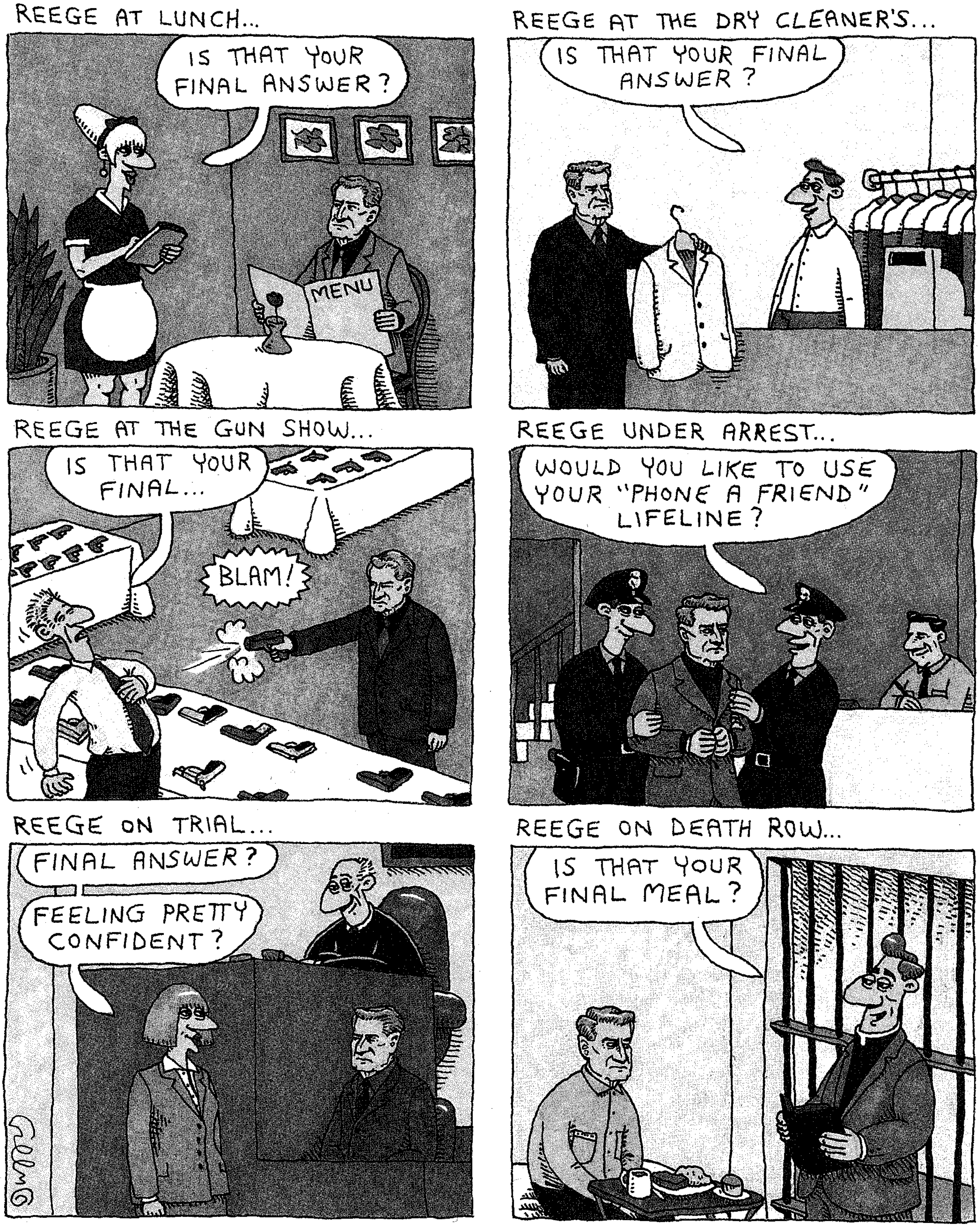
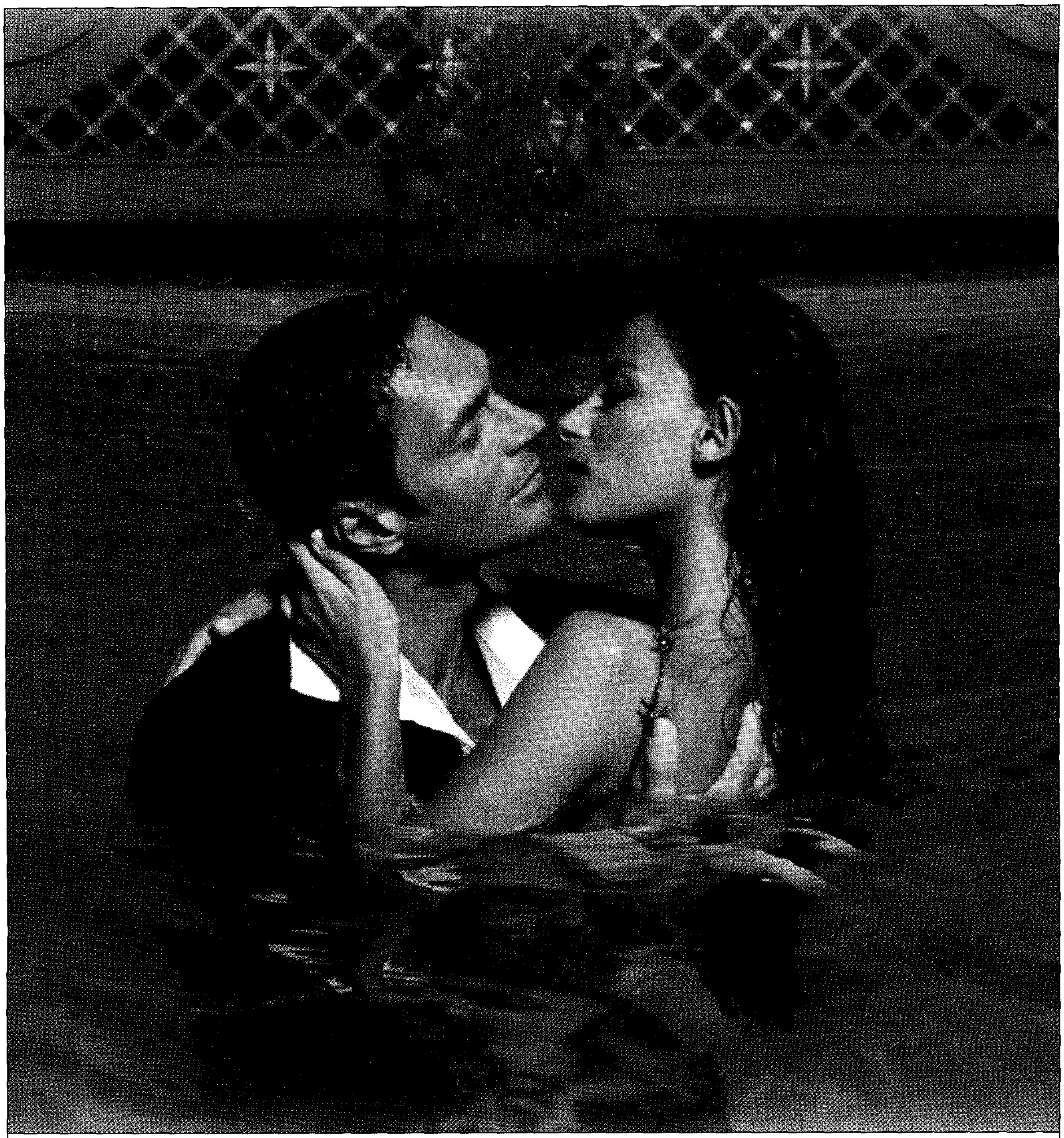
ERIC PALMA

THE BACK PAGE BY J. C. DUFFY

WHO WANTS TO BE REGIS?


REEGE AT LUNCH...
IS THAT YOUR FINAL ANSWER?
MENU
REEGE AT THE DRY CLEANER'S...
IS THAT YOUR FINAL ANSWER?
REEGE AT THE GUN SHOW...
IS THAT YOUR FINAL...
BLAM!
REEGE UNDER ARREST...
WOULD YOU LIKE TO USE YOUR "PHONE A FRIEND" LIFELINE?
REEGE ON TRIAL...
FINAL ANSWER?
FEELING PRETTY CONFIDENT?
REEGE ON DEATH ROW...
IS THAT YOUR FINAL MEAL?

Let's make a wish



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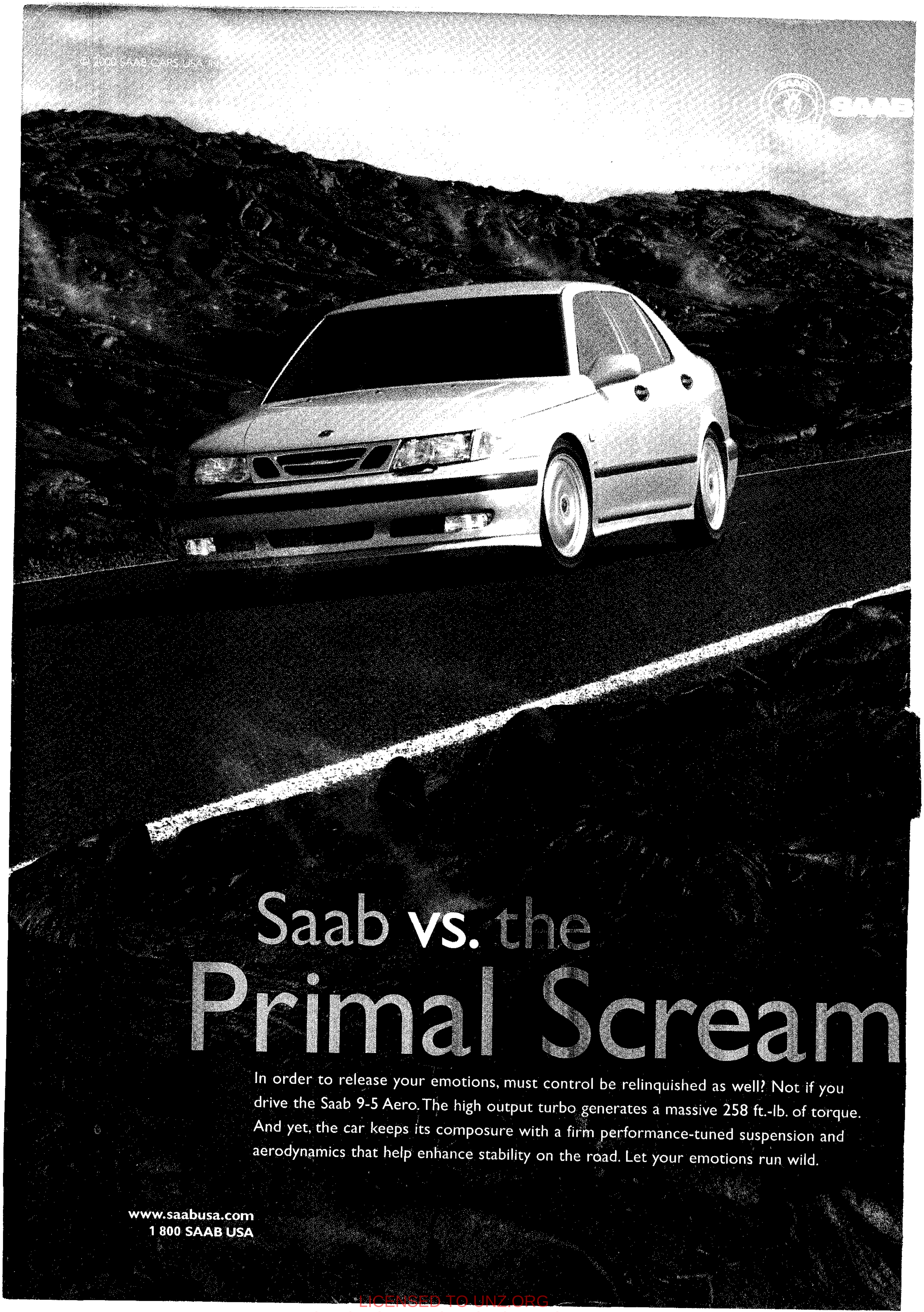

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